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## THE TRAIL OF ADVENTURE

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**OTTWELL BINNS**

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THE WHITE HANDS OF JUSTICE  
THE LIFTING OF THE SHADOW  
THE TRAIL OF ADVENTURE  
WHERE THE AURORA FLAMES  
A GIPSY OF THE NORTH  
JAVA JACK

# THE TRAIL OF ADVENTURE

BY  
OTTWELL BINNS

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED  
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

1925

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"THE town of Skagway at this period of its existence was about the roughest place in the world. The population increased every day. . . . Soapy Smith, a 'bad man,' and his gang of about 150 ruffians ran the town and did what they pleased; almost the only persons safe from them were the members of our force. Robbery and murder were daily occurrences . . . shots were exchanged on the streets in broad daylight, and enraged Klondykers pursued the scoundrels of Soapy Smith's gang to get even with them. At night the crash of bands, shouts of 'Murder!' cries for help mingled with the cracked voices of the singers in the variety halls . . . and occasionally some poor fellow was found lying lifeless on his sled, where he had sat down to rest, the powder marks on his back and his pockets inside out."

Colonel S. B. STEELE, C.B., M.V.O.,  
Late of the Royal North-West  
Mounted Police.

2672788

TO MY FRIEND  
ELLIS GREENHALGH, ESQ.

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# THE TRAIL OF ADVENTURE

## CHAPTER I

### IN SKAGWAY TOWN

SEEN from the deck of the steamer, Skagway, under a woolly sky that drizzled a persistent rain, was not a cheerful place. A mushroom town called into being by the discovery of the golden Klondike, in this year of its infancy, it was characteristic of its kind. A few frame buildings, largely saloons and gambling hells, an indifferent hostel or two, a handful of stores, several hundred tents where eager gold-seekers sought shelter from the roaring blasts coming down the White Pass, and an excessively miry street made up the city.

Its setting, however, was sufficiently picturesque. Situated on the fine fiord of the Lynn Canal, behind it like an amphitheatre lifted precipitous cliffs, and over it stark mountains frowned; whilst from it led the great White Pass, its trails already churned to slime, stinking with rotting horses, and strewn with the debris of stores cast away by too heavily burdened men. And over the Pass, behind the snow-capped peaks, was the new land of promise, rugged, inhospitable, inimical to the men whom it challenged by its golden lure, drawing them from the far places to prove their mettle, and wrest its hoard from the

frozen earth or failing in the endeavour to die by drowning in the rush of tumultuous streams; of hunger in the great woods; or of cold on the snowy trails under the chill fires of the aurora.

On the city, the starting-point of such immense endeavour, yet so forlorn and dejected in the cold drizzle, two men stood looking with ruminating eyes. Both were young, and each had the sinewy well-knit frame that the hard work of the trail demanded, but there the immediate resemblance ended. The taller one of the two was fair, with a rather long face, of a pronounced Roman type, grey-eyed, and with a golden moustache that was a shade or two lighter than his hair—obviously an Englishman of a stock that had lived long in his native land. The other, clean-shaven, rather sallow-skinned and keen-eyed, was more difficult to place until he spoke, when his speech betrayed him for an American.

"A cheerless hole, Ranleigh," he said with a laugh as he turned his eyes from the forlorn prospect to his friend.

"Yes, I was just thinking it was a queer jumping-off place for El Dorado."

The American, whose surname was Purnell, and whom patriotic parents had further named after the father of his country, laughed. "Yes. Suppose we go ashore and make its nearer acquaintance. The crowd has gone, and we'll be turned off here presently. Besides, we've got to find some lodging-place for the night."

They left the boat and were presently splashing knee-deep in the mud of young Skagway's main thoroughfare. By some miracle, the street was almost deserted; but coming towards them was an individual at whom, as he approached, the Englishman looked with a stony stare that masked a very lively curiosity.

This man was a short, red-haired individual who bristled with weapons, though there was nothing particularly truculent in his ruddy face. He carried himself with a braggart air, and as he drew near the two friends, he returned the Englishman's stare with interest, then quite suddenly he stopped, slipped a pistol from his belt, and, giving not the slightest warning, with amazing speed, emptied the weapon in the air above the heads of the astonished pair.

The American ducked instinctively as the bullets whistled over him; but Ranleigh, who had faced Jezail and Snider bullets on the Malakand, didn't flinch, but stared wrathfully at the red-haired ruffian who, finishing his jest, restored the pistol to its holster, grinned affably, and passed on his way.

"Well," began Ranleigh indignantly. "Of all the colossal cheek——"

"I wonder who the fellow is?" interrupted the American.

"Guess he's the mayor of this city, stranger," broke in a voice behind them.

They swung round to find a clerk, whom the firing had attracted, standing at the door of one of the stores.

"Mayor!" A flash of comprehension came into Roy Ranleigh's grey eyes. "Is that Soapy Smith?"

"Yep! That's Soapy; and he runs this location. Guess he was jest making you free of the town."

"Free of the town," cried Ranleigh, looking towards the swaggering figure going down the street; "for two pins——"

"I reckon I wouldn't if I was you, stranger. Soapy's a bad man to cross; an' he's the quickest shot in Skagway; besides, he's backed by a real nasty crowd. If you go bumping against him you won't have a dog's chance."

Ranleigh, however, was not intimidated by this warning. He stared after the receding figure of Skagway's mayor with angry eyes.

"I've half a mind to go after him and thrash——"

"No, you don't, Ranleigh," laughed his friend, linking arms with him. "There's no harm done, and remember we're just a pair of tender feet, and fair game for that kind of thing. Better forget the fool, and find our bed for to-night. The accommodation here doesn't look extensive."

He tugged at Ranleigh's arm, and the Englishman, after a last look over his shoulder, suffered himself to be led up the street, staring from side to side as he went. Most of the frame buildings, as he perceived, were saloons, dance halls and gambling-joints or a combination of all three. As they passed them sounds of revelry issued.

"Nice pandemonium this will be in a little time," said Purnell. "But I guess there never was a gold-rush yet that didn't bring the sharks with the tide. They—halloa!"

The noise of a pistol shot was the cause of the interjection, and before another word could be spoken a man with a yet smoking pistol in his hand emerged from the saloon and began to run up the miry street. Two other men followed, and immediately started to blaze away at the fugitive. The latter dodged round the corner of a frame building, and without delay returned their fire. Bullets whistled up and down the street; and it was suddenly borne on Purnell that the main thoroughfare was the most dangerous place in Skagway.

"The saloon!" he cried. "Quick!"

They bolted for it. In the doorway was a fourth man watching the fray, who laughed as they brushed by him, as if that from which they were fleeing was

a quite ordinary affair, as indeed it was at that period of Skagway's history. To Ranleigh, his laughter conveyed an impression of extraordinary callousness ; which impression was deepened by the scene inside, where a number of men were gathered, some playing poker and others tempting fortune at a roulette wheel. Not one of them showed the slightest consciousness of the fusillade proceeding in the street ; and not even the bored bar-tender remarked upon it until a bullet crashed into the woodwork of the saloon near the corner of the bar where he stood. Then he glanced up, grinned, and addressed himself to Purnell.

" Rotten bad shooting ! "

That was all ; and not until the shooting died away, and the two men who had been firing together re-entered the saloon and walked up to the bar, did he speak again.

" Git 'im ? "

" Nope ! " answered one of the sportsmen, whilst the other offered an explanation equally laconic.

" Vamoosed ! "

Purnell made a sign to his friend, and they walked to the door, very conscious that the men at the bar were regarding them curiously. When they reached the muddy street, the American gave a laugh of relief.

" A nice sort of purgatory we've tumbled into, Ranleigh. If this is Skagway in the daytime, what will it be when the shades of evening fall ? "

" I don't know ; but it seems pretty clear that the quickest and straightest pistol-shot stands the best chance of surviving. "

" Yes ! " laughed Purnell, adding, " The sooner we find decent cover the better ! "

It was not easy to find accommodation in the

crowded town ; but at the end of two hours they were fortunate enough to enter an hotel from which a small party was moving out, and so secured rooms. Then after an indifferent meal, Ranleigh desiring to make a purchase at one of the stores, they sallied forth again.

Darkness was now falling, and looking back they caught the radiance of the fires of the canvas town whilst the light from the saloons made it possible to descry the outline of the main thoroughfare and to avoid falling into the Lynn Canal. Choice of footing there was none, for the mud was everywhere ; and they plunged through it blindly towards the store which Ranleigh had marked in daylight. They made it without mishap, and as they entered the Englishman experienced a shock of surprise.

By the breast-high counter a girl was standing. A long, close-fitting tunic of moose-skin, beaded Indian fashion, outlined her lissom figure, and below it showed breeches and gum-boots. At her waist was a leather belt, from which hung a sheath-knife and a pistol holster, and under her Stetson hat showed masses of braided hair that in the light of the kerosene lamps had a ruddy tinge. But it was her face that held Ranleigh's gaze. It was flawless in its outline, and from the fine arching eyebrows looked forth a pair of eyes dark and piercing and in strange contrast to the brows above them. The nose was delicately aquiline, the mouth shapely and strong, and there was about her an air so virginal that the Englishman knew instinctively that here was no creature of the dance-halls or saloons, no callous slip of that brazen crowd who from the beginning of the gold rush dragged their shame from 'Frisco to Skagway and from the latter to Dawson and up the great river to Circle City in the very shadow of the Arctic.

She was, he assured himself, a child of the North, with the purity of the northern snows. As she stood at the counter making her purchases his wonder grew, for, save for the slightest American intonation, her English was as pure as his own, with an accent of culture that was in odd contrast to her beaded attire, to the weapons at her waist, and to the setting in which she stood.

He shot an interrogative glance at his friend, who, however, had not noticed the girl; but was busy reading a list of mining properties that were for sale; and then he looked at the girl again, trying to solve the problem of her personality. As he did so he became aware of an Indian hovering near the girl, a man who was plainly playing henchman to her; for at that moment the girl turned and addressed him in some native dialect, and the native moved obsequiously forward, and began to take up her purchases from the counter. As he marked the native a sudden possible solution of the problem of personality shot into Ranleigh's mind.

"A half-breed——"

The thought was but half-shaped when he dismissed it. And yet as he looked at the girl it recurred. Those dark, piercing eyes, the hint of bronze in the smooth softness of her cheeks—— But he had seen eyes as dark in the women of his own race, and the bronze might be no more than the tan of open air and northern suns, whilst the accent of her voice utterly belied the thought; it was too clear and crisp and——

His reflection got no further. At that point a man armed like a pirate and with desperado written all over him lurched into the store; and as he saw the girl, moved quickly towards her.

"Well met, Daisy," he began with a leer, and

before either the girl or Ranleigh could possibly anticipate his action, flung an arm round her.

As he did so the girl uttered a single word, which was plainly addressed to the Indian, for on the instant the latter dropped his parcels and sprang to her help. But Ranleigh was before him. He leaped twice, and then his fist shot out. The whole weight of his body was behind the blow, and as it caught him all unawares, the ruffian was driven forward against the counter at which he clutched wildly in an effort to save himself. But before he had recovered his equilibrium the Englishman struck again, sending him reeling to the floor. He rose mouthing the most frightful curses, and when he stood upright there was a pistol in his hand and murder in his flaming eyes.

"You cursed *cheechako*——"

The pistol was lifted for the death-shot, but as the trigger was pulled Purnell jumped in, jerking the ruffian's arm upward, and the bullet embedded itself in the wooden roof of the store. The would-be assassin swore again and wrenched his arm free, but by that time Ranleigh was at close quarters and before the man could fire he was seized and disarmed. Then Ranleigh conducted him to the door, and with no gentle hand flung him into the muddy street. When he picked himself up he was almost foaming, and stood shaking his fist at the Englishman in impotent and futile rage.

"You'll pay for this—you durned Britisher! You——" Ranleigh laughed, and turning into the store again, left the man mouthing futile oaths. Inside, he found the girl awaiting him.

"I thank you," she said, in a well-modulated voice. "It was very good of you to interfere, but there really was no need. I can defend myself against that kind of brute, whilst Nanook here would have



helped me. If you are staying long in Skagway I am afraid you have laid up a store of trouble for yourself."

"With a brute like that!" Ranleigh laughed carelessly. "I am not afraid——"

"That brute will have friends," broke in a new voice—that of the store-keeper. "His sort hunt in packs—like wolves in winter. And the leader of his gang is Soapy Smith, who bosses this city. So you're up against it considerable, young man."

"You don't mean to say you allow ruffians of that sort to run the place?" cried the Englishman. "Surely there are some decent citizens——"

"Yep. I'm one. But Soapy's mayor, an' all told there's a hundred an' fifty of his pack. If we started to clean 'em out it would be civil war; an' the man wot began the racket would need an undertaker inside ten minutes, for Soapy is a dead shot, with more notches on his gun for the men he's killed than any man in Alaska."

"That is the truth!" said the girl quietly. "And the sooner you are out of this store the better. If that man returns with his friends, you will be helpless."

"But you——" began Ranleigh in some concern.

"I shall be quite safe. Soapy Smith knows his limits. He won't range all the decent elements in the town against him by hurting me, and I beg of you to go whilst there is yet time. I have no doubt that the man whom you threw out is dragging the saloons for his comrades, and that presently they will be here——" She broke off, and a pleading light shone in her eyes. "Oh, do go!" she cried. "I should be unhappy if harm came to you, because you served me!"

There was a note of real urgency in her voice,

and the appeal of her fine eyes was not to be resisted.

"Very well," answered Ranleigh smilingly. "I will go; though I feel like a man running away from a battle, and leaving the field to the enemy. And I don't like——"

"Oh, please go!" cried the girl, interrupting him. "Every moment's precious."

"Very well," he answered, "since you insist—and for no other reason. Good-bye. I hope we may meet again."

He raised his cap, and passed out of the door, very conscious of the relief shining in the girl's dark eyes. A moment later he was overtaken by his friend, and as they made their way down the dark and muddy street, Purnell spoke.

"The mayor of this city wants hanging, by all accounts."

"Yes!" answered Ranleigh laconically, and a moment later added, "What a wonder of a girl! I wonder who she is."

"Don't know, an' can't guess," laughed the American. "Bit of a mystery, I should say, from the way she seems to drag that Indian round as footman. There's something very——"

He broke off sharply and gripped his friend's arm as the door of a saloon a little way down the street was flung open, and a bunch of men rolled out into the night. As the saloon door closed and the light was withdrawn, a babel of vociferous voices sounded, and the noise of squelching steps coming up the street was plain. A voice roaring above the rest reached their ears.

"A darn Britisher, boys; we'll show the whelp——"

Purnell tugged sharply at his friend's arm. A convenient opening between two frame buildings offered itself, and they plunged into it. The alley-

way was quite dark, and they stood there waiting till the noisy crowd went boisterously by.

"Now!" whispered Purnell as the last straggler disappeared. They moved into the street once more, and hurried on towards their hotel.

"Soapy's wolves are on the blood-trail!" said the American. "That girl was right. Every moment is precious, and——"

"But the girl?" cried Ranleigh, checking in his stride. "She——"

"She knows this town better than you or I, and she was not worrying except about you. Besides, she's sure to have cleared out. Come on!"

Ranleigh moved forward again, reluctant though he was to do so, and four minutes later they had reached their lodging-place. Once in their room, Purnell spoke again.

"We'll move out of this first thing in the morning if we can, and till then you had better lie low, whilst I get busy with the arrangements for quitting. Better keep an eye lifting. Those jackals of Soapy's may take it into their heads to comb the town for you. If they do——" He broke off and went to the window. It was small, but it opened on a hinge, and he measured it against himself. "You'll about be able to squeeze through there. If you hear them, don't hesitate. Vamoose! Go over the hill to Dyea, and wait for me at Sheep Camp. If you take the White Pass they will follow. I'll tote the outfit along. Now I'm off. Better bolt the door."

He disappeared, and Ranleigh, lighting a cigarette, gave himself up to reflection. Born of a law-abiding race, he was not greatly troubled by the thought of Soapy Smith and his gang. Accordingly, after a few minutes he dismissed them from his mind, and his thoughts went out to the girl, serving whom he

had embroiled himself with Soapy's scoundrels. Who was she? What was she doing in this lawless place?

That she was not a creature of the dance halls, he had been assured by his first glance at her, but beyond that he could not go; and he was still trying to find a solution of the mystery she embodied when he caught the sound of steps in the narrow corridor. As he listened he heard them halt at his door. With a little feeling of breathlessness, but without the slightest fear, he felt for his revolver, and as he drew it there came a sharp knock at the door.

"Who is there?" he demanded, slipping silently out of the line of the doorway.

"It is I! Open! Quick!"

He recognized the voice instantly, and as he struggled with the stiff bolt was conscious of a surge of exultation at his heart. Quarter of a minute passed before the bolt shot back, then as the door swung open, by the light of the stinking lamp that illuminated the corridor murkily, he saw the girl whom he had left in the store, standing in the doorway. She slipped into the room, and as he half-closed the door she spoke quickly.

"Bolt it!"

He did so, and then turned to face her, conscious that some grave thing must have brought her to see him in such haste.

## CHAPTER II

### THROUGH THE NIGHT

**T**HERE was a flush in the girl's face, her eyes flashed with excitement, whilst her voice quivered with apprehension as she spoke.

"You must leave here at once. That man and his friends are after you."

"I know! They passed us in the street on their way to the store."

"When they found you had gone they decided to search the town for you, and already they are going from place to place——"

"Ah!"

"So you must leave, secretly. If you can get away without being seen, I have a boat at the wharf, and I will take you round to Dyea. You can leave some message for your friend——"

"No need! We made arrangements to meet at Sheep Camp in case of trouble arising."

"Then you must come away at once. Those blackguards may arrive at any moment. Better bolt your door and slip away through the window——"

"That also we arranged," laughed Ranleigh.

"At once, then! I will await you at the wharf."

She turned towards the door, and he opened it for her. When she had disappeared down the corridor he rebolted it, and made swift preparations, gathering things that he would immediately need, and binding them with pack straps, then he extinguished the light, opened the window cautiously, and dropped the package out. As he did so a clamour of voices reached him. It came from the front of the hotel, and guessing that Soapy's satellites had already arrived, he squeezed through the window, dropped five feet or so, and slipped in the mud. In a twinkling he had picked himself up, gathered his pack, and slung it over his shoulders. Then with all speed he skirted the long frame building, making for the rear; and as he reached it, and turned the corner, he caught a roar of disappointed voices—the howl of the human pack from which he had escaped by so narrow a margin.

Stumbling and slithering in the mud, guided by

his keen sense of direction he worked his way round two or three buildings until he reached the main thoroughfare, in the neighbourhood of the primitive wharf; and as he appeared, a figure emerged from the shadows and clutched his arm.

"You have arrived. Thank God! This way!"

She led him to a place where a heavy boat was moored. Two men were already seated in it, and as Ranleigh and the girl boarded it one of them slipped the painter, and the other pushed off, and in a twinkling as it seemed to him they were moving down the Lynn Canal. He glanced back, and against the flaring lights of a saloon caught sight of a number of men silhouetted grotesquely. He had no doubt they were members of the gang that was hunting for him, and he pointed them out to the girl.

"There they are! I was only just in time. They were at the hotel entrance when I slipped through the window."

"You were fortunate," said the girl. "If they had caught you nothing would have saved you, for Soapy Smith and his bad men brook no opposition. They will not think of your escaping this way, however, and will waste their time in searching the town."

Ranleigh stared back through the darkness, wondering what his friend was doing; then as the boat caught the lift of the water, he turned and stared down the long arm of the sea up which the tide was making.

"How far is it to Dyea?"

"About four miles round the coast. It lies at the head of the inlet that forks from this one. I hope we may make it safely."

"Is there any doubt of that?" asked the young man in surprise.

"There are always risks on this coast. It's uncharted and unlighted and the winds sweep it like a

great broom. When we get round the point we shall meet the whisk of it, and this cobble is none too heavy for the seas we shall face."

A thought struck Ranleigh, and he asked quickly, "You were going there to-night—I mean, apart from getting me out of the lurch?"

"No!" answered the girl quietly. "I shall have to go back to Skagway to-morrow."

"Then it is for me you are taking the risks of this night journey."

"Well," came the reply, "after that incident in the store I could not very well leave you to the mercy of those scoundrels who would have had you before morning."

"You are fairly plunging me in your debt," he said. "I——"

"Call it quits," replied the girl with a little laugh. "And wait till we get to Dyea before you thank me."

Ranleigh was silent for a moment, then he asked: "How did you know I was at that particular hotel?"

"That was very simple," laughed the girl. "When you left the store I sent Nanook after you; and when I heard how that man was rounding up a crowd of ruffians to take you, I hurried to the hotel, described you to the proprietor, who knows me, and got your number and your name—Mr. Ranleigh."

"You got my name?" he laughed in surprise.

"Yes," she answered, "and I found it very interesting."

"I am glad of that," he said a little more fervently than the occasion seemed to demand. "But why——"

"Because it happens to be my own name!" she answered with a laugh.

"Great Scott!" cried the young man amazedly, staring at her through the darkness. Then he said incredulously, "You're jesting, of course?"

"No!" She laughed again at his incredulity. "It is the truth. I thought you would be surprised. I was, myself."

"You could knock me down with a straw!" he owned, and then asked: "You're from England, of course?"

"No, I have never been there in my life. I was born up here."

"It's a really gorgeous coincidence——"

He got no further. A gust of wind smote the cobble, and at the same time swept a small cascade of ice-cold water in his face. One of the men at the oars cried something to the girl in an Indian dialect and was promptly answered, then she spoke quickly to Roy Ranleigh.

"I shall have to help. We're meeting the tide, and the wind makes it difficult. There's a steering sweep——"

"I can work it," he said, "and from the look of things it's a man's job to-night."

When the sweep was found and fixed, he stood and worked it with a screw-like motion, keeping the boat-head on to the waves. The wind grew more violent, the waves higher, and presently a stormy moon sailing above the shadowy mountains revealed the point of the narrow cape which divides Skagway Bay from the Chilkoot Valley. Here the wind met them in full force, and in rounding the point, twice the boat was almost swamped; and Ranleigh began to realize that the girl's warning to save his thanks until they reached Dyea was not without warrant. But with the girl bailing, the two Indians almost breaking their hearts with the strenuousness of their endeavours, and Ranleigh using the steering-sweep with judgment they weathered the cape; and a moment later, with the wind roaring up the funnel of the Chilkoot



Valley, they were swept on towards their destination.

A slight change in their course brought them in the shelter of the wild coast. The white-capped mountains, with the spruce like great black shadows on their sides, seemed to be drawing nearer; and then through the wrack, pale in the moonshine, there lifted the lights of Dyea, and within a few minutes they had grounded on a sand-spit which served for wharf. As he stepped out of the boat and offered the girl his hand, Ranleigh was steaming like a wet clout before the fire; and the girl as she accepted his help was too cramped to make even the slightest spring. For a moment he faced the blistering wind to look back on the sea way that they had dared; then he looked at her with burning eyes.

"If I had known——" he began, and broke off.

"Yes?" she asked between chattering teeth. "If you had known?"

He jerked a hand towards the sea, and answered steadily: "We should not have come to Dyea!"

"You would sooner have faced Soapy Smith?" she asked with a little shaky laugh.

"Yes," he answered, "a thousand times—rather than you should have ventured that for me! Not for all the gold on the Yukon would I have agreed." As he made the declaration in earnest, forcible tones, the girl's face, wan and tired, was irradiated by a smile; and for a fleeting second her dark eyes gleamed in the moonlight, then the smile became a laugh.

"Well, having escaped the sea, there is no need that we should freeze!" She turned and gave some orders to her Indians, then spoke to him again. "Bring your pack along, and come with me. Dyea is more crowded than Skagway, but I know where we can find shelter and warmth."

She led the way from the sand-spit, across what

had once been a grassy flat but was now a trampled quagmire, and up Dyea street until they came to an hotel still in process of erection, but with a portion completed and already in occupation. When they reached it she spoke to her Indians, who stalked off up the street, and then she led the way into the hotel. At the office a bunch of new-comers were demanding a night's accommodation from the proprietor, who, chewing an unlighted cigar, listened to them with a grin wrinkling his jovial face. As they finished he shook his head.

"No use, bhoys," he said genially. "There ain't a plank in the whole caboose that ain't got its slumber-seeker. The place is jest bustin', an' if I take in anither the walls 'll shure open clane out."

"But what are we to do?" asked one of the tenderfeet, with a helpless air that augured ill for his success as a gold-seeker.

"Just hit the trail for one o' the bunk-houses up the street. Maybe they'll be able to find room for ye—on the floor or the roof. Ye should have toted tints alone with——"

"We have tents!" broke in one of the men.

"Then why in thunder don't ye stick 'em up? There's more men under canvas in Dyea the night than under wood! Off wid ye, bhoys, an' git busy. A clane tent is betther iny night than a lousy bunk-house!" He laughed as he made the jest; laughed again as the bunch of tenderfeet crowded to the door like huddling sheep; and then turned towards Ranleigh and the girl. As he did so a light of welcome leaped in his eyes.

"The saints preserve us! Ye, Miss Lisette? What joy-wind blows ye into Dyea this night, me child?"

The girl indicated her companion. "Soapy's wolves were after my friend, Mr. Ranleigh——"

"Ranleigh?" interjected the hotel proprietor "A relative, I——"

"No connection," broke in the girl quickly. "Just a friend who intervened to save me from insult from one of Soapy's scoundrels, and whom they were out to get even with. So Joe and Nanook and I brought him to Dyea out of harm's way, and now we want rooms for the night."

"There's one for ye always, me child; an' iny friend iv yours is welcome at the Aurora, but 'tis gospel-truth what I told thim tenderfeet that ivery plank has its slumberer; but *if* a shake-down in the cook-house 'll meet the gentleman's needs——"

"It will at any rate be warm there," laughed Ranleigh.

"Thin we'll call it done, for iny friend iv Miss Lisette is as welcome as the geese that fly North in the spring. Bring your pack this way, sir. We'll make ye comfortable for the night, somehow. But maybe ye'll be wantin' somethin' to ate first."

"No," answered Ranleigh.

"Thin come on, bhoy, before any other shtray bird shows up to demand to share the nist with ye. He turned to the girl. "Miss Lisette, ye know the way to the house quarters. The ould woman will jump for joy at the sight iv ye."

Ranleigh turned to the girl. "Good night, Miss Lisette, and many thanks for——"

The girl thrust out her hand and interrupted him smilingly. "Please! Please, Mr. Ranleigh." Then as he took her hand she said: "Good night, and good luck when you hit the gold-trail."

"But I shall see you again in the morning!" he cried protestingly.

"Possibly!" she said. "Possibly not. It depends at what hour you rise."

"Then I shall be up with the lark or whatever bird takes its place in Alaska," he said with a laugh, but with a ring of earnestness that brought the quick blood to the girl's face.

There was a sound of heavy feet in the doorway, and two unkempt men, plainly prospectors, entered the hotel.

"This way, bhoy!" said the proprietor in low warning, "or I'll not be able to deny ye company."

Ranleigh waved his hand to the girl, and followed the Irishman into the recesses of the hotel.

When they reached the rather primitive kitchen the proprietor bade the young man make himself at home.

"I'll bring ye blankets an' a pillow prisently, an' ye'll be as snug as a mouse in a hole. There's many a worse lodgin' in Dyea to-night."

The place was littered with pots and pans and great tin dishes, but when the blankets had arrived and a rough bed had been made up within reach of the warmth from the stove, Ranleigh owned that his host was right; and as he stretched himself luxuriously among the blankets his heart went out to the girl to whom he owed his arrival in Dyea.

As he visioned her again, kneeling in the ice-cold water, bailing steadily, his heart glowed with something warmer than mere admiration for her courage, and for a long time he permitted himself to dwell upon the picture which his mind recalled; but presently, overcome by the heat, he slept, and in his sleep passed into dreams that had nothing to do with the treasure of gold that had brought him to the bleak inhospitable North.

## CHAPTER III

## THE TRAIL OF THE CHILKOOT

**D**AYLIGHT was not yet come when Roy Ranleigh was awakened by a clatter of pans, and as he stretched himself and rubbed his eyes he became aware of a stout middle-aged woman who regarded him with an amused stare.

"'Tis sorry that I am to disturb ye, sorr; but in half an hour the bhoys wantin' to hit the trail will be shoutin' for breakfast."

"Don't mention it," said Ranleigh, rolling out of his blankets. Then he asked with a laugh, "Is the lark up yet?"

"The lar-r-k! Shure I've nevvver heard av the craythure up here! But why d'ye ask?"

"Because I promised to be up with it this morning," laughed the young man, pulling on his boots.

The woman laughed with him. "I should say ye was a thrifle ahead of the bi-r-rd, sorr."

"That's good! Tell me where I can get a wash in this establishment."

"There's a well at the back," said the woman, "an' a line av tin basins. Maybe ye'll be afther having a towel av your own?"

"Yes, and soap."

"'Tis the lucky man ye are, for soap is terr'ble short in Dyea these days!" laughed the woman.

"But there, 'tis no throuble to some men."

Ranleigh laughed with her and made his way to the well and to the line of tin basins which the establishment provided for the ablutions of particular guests, and after a swill he returned to the hotel, his face aglow, his eyes shining with expectation.

Making his way to the restaurant he encountered the proprietor, who greeted him genially.

"Good morning to ye, Mr. Ranleigh; I hope the night wint peacefully with ye."

"I never knew of its going," laughed the young man.

"Thin 'twas a perfect night," said the Irishman cheerfully. "But ye'll be wantin' breakfast——"

"Oh, I am in no hurry," answered Ranleigh, glancing at the yet empty restaurant. "I suppose Miss Ranleigh isn't about yet."

The Irishman laughed cheerfully. "Up and gone these two hours or more!"

"Gone!"

As he echoed the word there was a surge of intense disappointment in Ranleigh's heart, and a look of such blank dismay on his face that the hotel proprietor checked his laughter, and offered explanation.

"The child was in a mortal hurry to git back to Skagway, havin' ter hit the trail North to-day. 'Twasn't possible that she could shtay. But she left a message for ye."

"A message?" cried Ranleigh, his face aglow with eagerness.

"Yes! She said I was to tell ye that she wished ye 'Good luck on the trail an' plinty iv colour in the pan!'"

The glow died out of the young man's face. "Was that all?" he asked. "Was there nothing more?"

"Nivver a word, me son."

"But she was taking the northward trail, you said?" cried Ranleigh with new hope. "Perhaps you know her destination?"

The Irishman shook his head. "Distination? No. That's a saycret the child an' her father keep to themselves!"

"She has a father? Is he a miner? Tell me."

"'Tis nothin' I kin tell ye, bhoy. Ranleigh befriended me once whin I was grubbin' roots an' eatin' bark to keep me soul out iv purgatory, an' 'tis not for me to go shoutin' in the strate what Ranleigh wants to keep dark. Maybe as ye're going North ye may run against the child, but 'tis not likely."

Ranleigh was conscious of a sense of desolation. The girl had gone, and the North was so vast and wild that he knew it was little likely that he and the girl would cross trails again. But there was still a hope that he might see her.

"Is there a boat here that I could hire to take me to Skagway?"

"Nivver a boat will ye git to make the journey."

"But there's a trail over the hills?"

"There is, bhoy; but ye'll not be takin' it."

"Why not?" demanded Ranleigh, a little heat in his tones.

The Irishman put a kindly hand upon his shoulder.

"Because Miss Lisette wouldn't want ye to. The child brought ye here last night at some risk to save ye from bigger risks at Skagway. Ye don't want her to hear that she made the venture for nothin', an' that afther all Soapy's crowd plugged ye in Skagway street. 'Twould be an ungracious thing for ye to follow her back, bhoy, an' well ye know it."

Ranleigh did know it, and owned as much. "Of course you're right. But can't you give me a hint as to where in the North I might look for her?"

"Well now——" began the Irishman, then broke off and stared at the young man with measuring eyes. Then he said, "Ye're a gentleman, av course."

"I hope so," said Ranleigh, though the other's words had been an affirmative rather than a question.

"There's quality about ye, as in anyone can see;

maybe in the ould counthry ye're . . . well . . . something or somebody? Maybe ye've a handle to the name iv ye?"

Ranleigh laughed a little at the Irishman's question but answered frankly: "I'm a baronet in England."

"By all the saints, if that isn't a wonder!" cried the Irishman, staring at him in amazement.

"Why?" demanded Ranleigh, divining that there was something behind the Irishman's words to which he himself had no clue.

"'Tis not for me to tell ye, bhoy," answered the other promptly, "an' if ye ax me I will not do so. But 'tis sure the finger iv Providence is in the pie. I guess ye're going to Dawson?"

"Of course!"

"An' beyond, belike?"

"That is very possible!"

"An' ye want to see the li'l girl agin?"

"Yes."

The Irishman considered a moment, then he asked: "I guess li'l Lisette can hang your scalp on the tepee pole right enough?"

In spite of the seriousness of his desire for information, Roy Ranleigh laughed.

"Well——" he began, only to be interrupted.

"Say no more, bhoy. I see how it is with ye, an' this much I'll tell ye: If ye should happen to go beyond Dawson, as far as the counthry that lies between the big bend iv the Porcupine River, 'tis barely possible that ye'll meet the girl agin."

"Can't you be more precise, Cavannah?"

"Divil a bit," answered the Irishman. "Already I've told ye more than I should; an' ye'll have to be contint, though to be sure if ye was to move slickly an' git in front ye might wait for the colleen at Lake Bennett."



"Then I'll have breakfast in double quick time and take the trail!" cried the younger man joyously.

"I thought ye would," laughed the Irishman, and left him to his own resources; but when Ranleigh had buckled the pack-straps about him, and was ready for the start, Cavannagh appeared again. "Good luck on the trail an' plinty iv colour in the pan—an' a praste to the hand iv ye, when ye're wantin' him for the weddin'."

He laughed a great rolling laugh of friendliness as he made the addition to the girl's own message, and thrust out a hand to his departing guest. Ranleigh took it on the instant.

"Thank you, Cavannagh!" he said simply, and two minutes afterwards was hitting the trail up Dyea street.

Early as he was, there were many others ahead of him; part of that unending line of men which for weeks had crawled out of Dyea up to Sheep Camp, and over the frowning and inhospitable Chilkoot. These men for the most part were heavily laden, with shoulders new to the galling pack-straps, and bending to their burdens. Lightly laden as he was, Ranleigh soon began to overtake and pass the trudgers. The most of them were young, and like himself new to the country, though here and there were grizzled veterans who had tramped the desolate wastes and panned the bottom of many a stream in search of pay-dirt long before the great discovery of placer gold on Bonanza Creek had set the world ringing, and brought the Ishmaels of the earth to share the spoil.

As he passed the heavily-burdened seekers of the Golden Fleece, with a quite natural curiosity, Ranleigh looked at his fellow-Argonauts, crawling up the muddy trail. In the first mile or two almost all faces had the same look of eagerness; and not-

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withstanding the packs that bowed the shoulders, all the pedestrians were characterized by an elasticity and alertness that sprang from sheer hopefulness. They were on the gold-trail at last, and anticipation was singing in the heart.

But presently there came a change. The eagerness died out as the strain of the desperate realities of the trail began to tell, and all the elasticity withered before the cutting wind screaming down the Pass and adding weight to the already cruel packs. Soon he began to pass men resting from their bitter labours, and the farther he went the more numerous these became; and yet these seemed in no way to diminish the long line of men who crawled like slowly-moving ants, toiling up the heart-breaking valley towards the menacing pass. He could see that line winding in and out on the trail where in places the passage of many feet had churned the moss to mud; which farther on ran across flinty places, and over heaped-up boulders of granite heaved from the hills in forgotten ages, over which men literally crawled, with faces set and grim, or groaning and gasping curses according to the nature of each man.

There were places where that line could only move forward on all-fours, and yet it moved—over ground that drew blood. He saw where it disappeared in the dark woods only to re-emerge, moving still, but with infinite slowness towards storm-shattered, glacier-worn, weather-beaten Chilkoot. Across the whiteness of the snow-field he could mark its progression clearly; slowly overcoming the towering and massive barrier that the gaunt and ragged front of the mountain opposed to the puny endeavour of men. From far down the valley it seemed impossible that the line of marching men could ever pass the hoary and storm-swept crest. And yet there was the evidence of his

eyes that it did ; for up across the ice and snow it crawled, its component parts no bigger than flies on the white ceiling of some large room, then the line ended, and as he watched he knew that the disappearance of each black dot that in turn made the head of the line and passed from sight meant that for some man of iron will and resolute heart the first gateway to the treasure-house of the North was won.

But not all were destined to pass that frowning and frozen portal. The way up from the sea, with its bogs, its boulders, its swamps, its roots, its stumps, its slippery places, its sixty-foot pine-trunk flung across the wild Dyea river by way of a bridge, was a great sifter of men. It tested the spirit, and only the indomitable and the true Argonauts survived ; the rest it broke and flung away as too feeble for the stern quests of the North. Long before they reached the snow-line, before even they reached Sheep Camp, many of these knew defeat, and fell aside from the trail, oppressed with their fate. One such whom Ranleigh stumbled on was seated on a rock at the side of the trail, with his pack unbuckled and thrown off, a look of utter despair on his face, his eyes fixed in stony gaze on the storm-beaten giant that guarded the Golden North.

As Roy Ranleigh caught the look in the man's eyes he halted.

"What's the matter, chum ? "

The man flashed a single glance at him, then once more his eyes fixed themselves upon Chilkoote in stony and fascinated gaze.

"Matter ? " he said hoarsely, with a wave of his arm towards the hoary height. "*That's* the matter. I can't go forward, that—that thing would kill me. It's waiting, just waiting to do it."

"Nonsense, man," said Ranleigh ; "get a move

on and forget it. You have it in you to walk over it."

"Walk over it?" The man laughed in a crazy kind of way. "The brute would hit me, pulverize me, throw me in dust to the wind! I can feel it. It is just waiting to do it, crouching up there like a beast." He broke off, flashed a second glance at Ranleigh, then he said suddenly: "The Angel with the flaming sword—it's that blasted Chilkoot!"

Ranleigh recognized that the man's nerve was gone, that there was nothing to be done with him, and passed on.

He met other defeated men, or passed them sitting helpless and hopeless by the implacable trail. At one place he came upon two men bending over a third, who lay stiff and cold, with a pistol in his dead hand; who, in defeat, had been too sore to live.

And everywhere there were men whose faces were grey-white with the strain of their endeavour; men with grim lines about their mouths, and a tense, fixed look in their eyes, who, galled by the pack straps and crushed by unaccustomed burdens, still staggered on, fearing defeat but fighting against it, and matching their indomitable souls against the harsh immensities of an alien and inimical nature. To these men every step of the way was pain, every yard burdened with the imminence of defeat; and yet each step represented victory, and each yard won in such dismay was a triumph for the human spirit.

Such men, falling into the mud-holes of the trail, lifted themselves out, and with faces tense and teeth hard-set staggered on once more. When they slipped among the chaos of granite fragments tossed from the high hills in ages past as if to form a barrier to the advance of covetous humanity, and helpless by reason of their heavy packs rolled backwards, they took little

account of cuts or bruises, but with sore limbs and blooded faces, gathered themselves up and went anew to the assault ; the set hypnotic look in the eyes, the grim lines of agony deepened about their mouths. When they were forced to rest on that terrible Via Dolorosa, these men threw themselves down and lay sprawling by the trail like the dead men who were not infrequent on that road ; but presently, cursing, or in silence that was even more eloquent of the strain on their resolution, they gathered themselves up, and moved on their way once more, puny atoms of life matching themselves against the inanimate immensities, which dwarfed them so that they seemed no bigger than sluggish aphides crawling across the world.

As Ranleigh, with his light burden, looked on them, a great pride in his race awoke within him, and he found himself marvelling at what men could endure and not yield. But there were odd contrasts that took his eyes also, and that made him marvel scarcely less at the follies of men. Rounding a pile of rocks which made a screen against the wind where almost all the packers who could find room came to rest, a raucous American voice broke on his ears.

"Ten dollars against five that none of you Jasonites places the pea. Watch the little sprite and see where he hides, then make your bets, gentlemen. So long as the bank lasts you may pile up the dollars without any of the toil of old 'Ercules. Now, you boys, which of you makes the dollars? "

Looking towards the speaker, Ranleigh saw a man standing by a small folding table on which reposed three walnut shells, around which, drawn by curiosity or the gambling instinct, were a number of trailers, their straps thrown off, and the packs lying on the ground.

"Now, you pioneers of the Golden North, you saw

me place the bean. Which of you backs the quickness of his eye against the dealer's clumsy hand? Ten dollars to five, a hundred to fifty for the man who'll find the fairy."

A big man, bowed beneath an immense pack, stumbled forward. His eyes seemed glued to the shells, and he fumbled in his pocket whilst the shell-man eyed him indifferently, and chanted carelessly: "Three little nigger shacks standing in a row; find the little nigger boy an' colla' the dough."

The big man drew forth his wallet, solemnly placed a five-dollar bill on the table, and putting a quick hand over one of the shells, as if fearful of some slim action on the part of the owner of the game, lifted it. The pea reposed there plain for all to see. The operator groaned.

"Optic-men all dead from starvation where you come from, Rube, I'll lay. But the bank is honest and the bank pays so long as its doors are open. There's your ten dollars. Ten dollars in two seconds; better than a pay-claim on Bonanza. Keep it up an' you'll be a millionaire before you're over the Chilkoot. You got sharp eyes, Rube; sharpest I ever seen. Watch whilst I shuffle the shells an' add to your little store by another little flutter." He shuffled the shells, and lifting his hands looked at the heavy-laden one expectantly. But with a sheepish grin on his face, the man shook his head, backing slowly away; and it was plain that, having won, he would gamble no more.

The operator of the game looked at him reproachfully and addressed him in tones of pained surprise. "You milk the bank an' quit the game! Well, I've no remedy, Rube. I takes my chances an' stand my losses, but I'd call it a favour if yer'd just tell me in wot state they raises such eagle-eyed young Solons as you. Speak up, Rube!"

"New England," owned the other as, still with the grin upon his face, he continued to back away.

"Might hev known it!" groaned the operator. "They're so durn thrifty down there, an' savin' banks is like berries on a bush! But will any other gent say where the nigger slumbers? Three little nigger shacks standing in a row——"

Another man, quite young, lured by the thought of easy gain, stepped forward. It was as plain as daylight that he was convinced that he knew under which shell the pea rested; and Ranleigh, interested in spite of himself, took a step forward the better to see.

"I'll lay a hundred dollars that I find it."

"A hundred!" The operator whistled and then laughed. "Well, boy, the bank will stand it, an' we're here for big business as for small. If you'll count out the papers you kin find the sleeping beauty. The bank faces the risks."

The young man counted his bills and pointed to the shell of his choice. Ranleigh, however, did not see the shell lifted, for at that moment the big man who had won the ten dollars, still retreating from the table, stumbled backward, and fell with his pack against the Englishman. Ranleigh put up his hands to save the man, and they rested on the pack, which pressed almost flat with the weight of the bearer resting on it. In a second the big man had recovered himself and swung round, a silent but ferocious menace in his eyes. Roy Ranleigh was amazed, then the man said gruffly: "Thank yer, pard. Yer saved me from the muck."

Before the Englishman could reply the man moved quickly away, and at that moment the voice of the shell operator broke out exultantly.

"The bank wins this time! What we loses on

the roundabouts comes swinging back to us on the swings, an' so we gets bed an' board an' a dollar for the day when it rains. 'Three little nigger shacks standin' in a row——' "

Suddenly Ranleigh understood the ferocious look that he had seen in the big man's eyes. The fellow was a decoy, a booster, in partnership with the man by the little table ; and the big pack upon his back was a fraud, as was his whole make-up as an innocent miner. He looked round and saw the man regarding him with watchful eyes. For a moment he was tempted to proclaim the fraud, then realizing the absolute uselessness of any such proceeding on his part, he shrugged his shoulders and turned up the trail towards Sheep Camp, marvelling at the trivial follies of men in a setting of immensities so terrible and august.

## CHAPTER IV

### A CROOKED MEETING

**S**HEEP CAMP lay well up the pass, a dozen miles or so from the sea, a canvas town for the most part, scattered among the willows and the scrubby spruce. All the worst features of Skagway, with which Roy Ranleigh had made so swift an acquaintance, characterized the place where many thousands were encamped, and where "bad men" flourished like the green bay tree of ancient fame.

Before he reached the place he was making for, a log building which served as hotel and restaurant, he had twice heard the busy hum of that buzzing, fuming hive punctuated by shots, and when he arrived at his destination he saw a man posting up a written notice, whilst a group of men watched him with interested eyes. Amongst them was a tall man wearing a scarlet



tunic, yellow-banded breeches, and a Stetson hat, and to him one of the onlookers, having read the notice, addressed himself.

"Bah!" he said, "another o' them durned miners' meetings arranged by the crooks what runs this camp, I'll swear. If they're honest, why the blazes don't they give us a bunch of men like you. There's no miners' meetings for the protection of our common rights your side the line, I'll bet."

"I never heard of one," laughed the mounted policeman, who by token of the triple chevron on his arm was a sergeant. "But, you see, we don't let crooks and cache-robbers cross the boundary, and so we keep the game in our hands."

As he caught the tones of the sergeant's voice Ranleigh moved quickly into a position where he could see his face, and the next moment, as he was thrusting towards him, the sergeant caught sight of him.

"Ranleigh!" he shouted in joyous recognition. "You!"

"In the flesh!" laughed Ranleigh, taking the strong hand which the other thrust towards him. "How are you, Jim?"

"Tip-top! And you? But there's no need to answer. You carry your health certificate in your face—though I suppose you're bitten with the gold-bug like all this crowd."

"More or less," laughed his friend. "Do you mean to say you've escaped?"

"I'm immune—innoculated against it," replied the sergeant gaily. "It's my business to look after the lunatics who're delirious from its bite."

"What, here in Sheep Camp? I thought that this was American territory and——"

"So it is! My beat starts at the summit, on the other side of an invisible line. There's a police post

up there, where we collect customs dues and turn back undesirables. We're out of tobacco, and I've just strolled down here to buy in." He broke off, looked round and then laughed. "A flourishing little offshoot of hell, isn't it?"

"Pretty bad, I should say," agreed Ranleigh. "But what are you doing in that gay attire, Holdsworth?"

The sergeant gave a downward glance at his scarlet tunic and yellow-braided pantaloons, then he permitted himself to laugh.

"Pretty gorgeous I'll own, but it's one a man wears with pride. From the Chilkoot there to Hudson Bay, it stands for the *lex Britannica* and the fear of God." He laughed, looked round the spread of Sheep Camp, and added a little grimly: "If we had the handling of this sink of iniquity——" Again he checked himself. "But our job begins the other side of the line. I suppose you're going over, Ranleigh?"

"In a day or two. I shall wait here for my outfit, which my friend and partner is bringing along. Having fallen foul of one of Soapy's scoundrels, I had to clear out of Skagway rather hurriedly last night."

"Then you'd better not wait in Sheep Camp," said the sergeant quickly. "Soapy's ruffians operate up here as well as in Skagway, they swarm on both trails below the White Pass and the Chilkoot. If Soapy has a downer on you, you'd better come and bunk at the post on the summit."

"I shall be only too glad," owned Ranleigh. "This place doesn't look attractive."

"It isn't," laughed Holdsworth. "So if you like we'll lunch and go up higher."

The sergeant led the way into the restaurant, gave an order, and then, having started a cigarette, he looked at his friend.

"Do you know, Ranleigh, I can't fix you in this gallery. You're the very last chum I should have expected to meet on the gold-trail."

Roy Ranleigh laughed a little self-consciously. "Two months ago I should have declared such a meeting an impossibility myself."

"It's wonderful how the yellow fever gets fellows," laughed Holdsworth. "While I've been on the Chilkoot no fewer than four old Cliftonians have gone through, and you'll make the fifth."

"Oh," said Ranleigh carelessly, "it isn't the fever with me, at any rate, not to any serious extent. It's —er—"

He broke off rather sharply, and his friend glanced at him shrewdly, then chuckled: "Ah! A petticoat, of course."

"How did you guess, Jim?" asked Ranleigh, without denying the implication.

"Well, it wasn't a guess exactly," laughed the sergeant. "You remember Lindsey, who——"

"He was in New York!"

"Yes, crossed trails with you, and brought the news up here that you were about to restore the ancient fortunes of the house of Ranleigh by union with a dollar princess, and the fact that you're going North suggests that you've been turned down."

"Not altogether that," answered the baronet a trifle grimly. "I've been turned loose to make good, but I am supposed to be on affectionate terms with the lady. I'm—well, at the end of a long string!"

"Sounds nice!" commented the sergeant. "If the lady pulls the string you go back, I sup——"

"By the rod of Aaron, no! I'm going to prove that I can make good in order to get back my own self-respect; and if I can't make good this way, then the Ranleigh fortunes can go to pot!"

"Um! Is that so?"

"That's the whole case! I've eaten the bread of humiliation once, and it had a bitter taste. There was a bad moment when I saw myself through the eyes of a girl who is quite willing to buy a title with her father's millions, and the truth is that in that moment I felt the meanest thing that crawls."

"The girl must have a little self-respect of her own if she sent you up here to qualify for——"

"Don't run away with any idea of that sort," interrupted Ranleigh with a harsh laugh. "I don't think it matters a button whether I qualify or not. The truth is, that there was a coronet in the offing; and if that's to be bought——"

The sergeant laughed suddenly. "So you're let out on a string to run up here, and if the coronet goes by the lady on the other side, then she'll pull the string and you——"

"No!" rapped Ranleigh sharply. "I'm through with marriage as a means to fortune. I'm out to prove myself a man, and I've cut that string for good and all. If she does jerk she'll just haul in the slack."

Sergeant Holdsworth laughed. "That dollar princess didn't quite know what she was about in sending you up here on a leash."

"She didn't!" answered Ranleigh, with a sudden short laugh. "That's true, anyway."

As he finished speaking he fell into a momentary abstraction, in which space of time he visioned a girl in a beaded moosehide tunic and breeches, crouching in the bottom of a boat, baling steadily without any sign of fear; and a light of tenderness shone in his eyes. His friend noted it, and wondered; then recalled him to the subject under discussion by asking curiously: "Who was the lady, Roy?"

"Name of Edith—family name van Corlow!"

"Not one of *the* van Corlows?"

"If you mean by that the van Corlows who are the great mining people, you're wrong. She is; daughter of Cornelius van Corlow——"

"Phew! You flew middling high!" commented the sergeant, with a laugh. Then he asked: "I suppose you know the firm is up here, prospecting through its agents, buying claims and what not?"

"No," answered Ranleigh. "I didn't know, and in any case I don't care."

His friend laughed. "That's the way to take it. I was only warning you so that you would be prepared if you ran against van Corlow himself, as you very well may. I suppose you will be going on to Dawson?"

Roy Ranleigh remembered what Cavannagh had said at the Aurora about the possibility of meeting Lisette Ranleigh in the Porcupine country, and nodded. "Yes—and beyond, I expect."

"Beyond?"

"Yes! From the look of things half the population of two hemispheres will be concentrated at Dawson by next year, so I shall hit the high places beyond."

"Well, perhaps you'll be wise. There won't be a yard of ground left unstaked in the Dawson country in a few months at the rate the stampede is progressing, and—— Hello, here comes the lunch at last!"

The meal was an indifferent one, but they brought the sauce of hunger to it, and were indisposed to be too critical, and when it was ended the Sergeant said: "Time we started, I think, Ranleigh. There's plenty of collar work in front of us."

Without further delay they set their faces towards the summit, threading their way through the maze

of tents and stacked supplies which crowded the trail in the vicinity of Sheep Camp, and presently they were units in that endless procession, which wound up towards the ragged, riven front of the Chilkoot. Here the struggle was even harder than down in the cañon, and the men who had turned themselves into mere beasts of burden travelled more slowly, and measured shorter distances between their intervals of rest. The same white, strained faces, fixed eyes, and mouths set in grim determination presented themselves. At all possible resting-places men sprawled like the dead; and others huddled against their packs, eyes closed, waiting till breath came back, and thundering hearts quietened down, before resuming that trail of pain.

As they breasted the rocky Scales the brightness went out of the day, and a roaring wind, the wild breath of the Chilkoot, brought a rolling mass of cloud which was full of icy sleet, and this lasted until, gasping, heads down and bent almost double in their endeavour to evade the blast and the sleet, they made the log shack of the police-post at the summit of the pass, which marked the boundary line; and which to hundreds of the toiling Argonauts, ignorant of the terrors of the trail that lay beyond, seemed like the winning of the gates of Paradise.

Arrived there, Ranleigh was content to throw himself in a police bunk and rest. He was too exhausted to talk; and, half frozen by the bitter wind and the icy sleet, for a time his brain was too numbed even to think. But when the heat of the stove, fed by wood that was dragged over seven miles of the bitterest trail in the world, began to thaw him, and, assisted by a pint of steaming coffee, his brain began to function once more, he found himself wondering however Purnell would get their double outfit up to

this point where the trail dipped to Crater Lake and down to Linderman, where the water trail North began. Finally, he put the problem to his friend, who laughed and explained.

"He'll pick up Indian packers down in Dyea. They're experts, and they'll pass others on the road."

Relieved by the information, he began to interest himself in the details of the police-post, and the following day he made the boat journey across Crater Lake in order to explore the trail beyond, and when he returned it was moving towards evening.

"Thought you were never coming," said Holdsworth quickly, as he entered the post. Then in a manner that was almost too casual, he asked: "What was the name of that partner of yours, Ranleigh?"

"Purnell! George Wash——"

"Great Scott!" cried the other. "Then it is he!"

"What's up?" demanded Ranleigh quickly.

"He's in trouble—big trouble—down at Sheep Camp. One of our fellows brought the news just now. He's accused of murdering a prospector going out——"

"What utter rot!" cried Ranleigh vehemently.

"Maybe! But that's the story; and there's a miners' meeting to-night, which will probably hang him out of hand unless he can show a clean bill."

Roy Ranleigh turned sharply to a wooden peg where hung his belt and pistol holster which he had left behind him in the morning, knowing there was little need for weapons on the Canadian side of the boundary. Without a word he began to buckle it on. Holdsworth watched until the operation was concluded, then he asked quietly: "Going down?"

"Yes!" was the laconic reply.

"Then I think I'll come with you," said the ser-

geant thoughtfully. "I've no *locus standi* on the American side; and as your friend is an American citizen, if I were to butt in, Heaven knows! it might create an international situation. But I can see that you don't come to any hurt."

"If they try to hang Purnell, I may be hurt a good deal," said Ranleigh shortly.

The other nodded. "I understand, Purnell's your partner; and I should feel the same if I were in your shoes. But don't do anything hasty, Roy. A lot will depend upon who is running this miners' meeting. There's a perfectly lawless crowd down at the camp, and if members of that are running the meeting it may be worth while to play a strong hand against them. On the other hand, if they're honest citizens, and your friend is *bona fide* innocent——"

"I could stake my life upon it!"

"You'll have a chance of doing so, if the wrong crowd are running the meeting; for Sheep Camp is worse than either Dyea or Skagway."

As they started, the wind, blowing down the pass, brought with it an icy rain; and by the time they were stumbling among the tent ropes of Sheep Camp they were drenched and half-frozen.

"Straight for the hotel and the restaurant," said Holdsworth. "They won't hold a meeting outside in this weather, and the feeding-place is the biggest room in the camp."

As they approached it they found a crowd surging round the doors, and without more ado thrust themselves into the thick of it. The throng was good-humoured enough, and Ranleigh rejoiced as he realized that most of them were genuine gold-seekers, who would not carelessly make themselves responsible for a man's death. Pushing and thrusting, squirming and wriggling their way as best they could, at length



they found themselves wedged just inside the doorway and unable to move a step forward. The meeting had already been constituted, for a chairman had been elected and with his chair set on one of the trestle-legged tables, was thumping with a mallet a packing-case, on which were papers and a small moosehide bag, in strenuous endeavour to obtain order. As Ranleigh's eyes fell on him he gave a start, for the man was the shell-game proprietor whose operations he had witnessed on the trail up from Dyea.

"Crooked business!" he said laconically as he made the recognition.

"How do you know, Ranleigh?"

"That man in the chair is no miner. I saw him operating the nimble pea on the trail."

"Sure?"

"I am very sure," was the answer.

"And you're dead right," said the man next to him.

"I saw him pluck a youngster to the tune of a hundred dollars, an' that scamp who's climbing on the table was standing in with him."

Ranleigh looked quickly at the man in question, and recognized him as the man whom he had seen carrying the bogus pack. That recognition confirmed him in the opinion he had already formed, that, however the charge brought against his friend had arisen, the court was crooked, and that anything but justice would be meted out against an honest man.

"Boys! . . . Boys!" bellowed the chairman, pounding on the packing-case with his mallet. "Order, boys; order in the court!"

It was a little time before his demands were acceded to, and then he looked down, and in a voice that was mockingly judicial he said: "Prisoner at the bar, stand up."

As he gave the order there was a little movement

on his left, and Ranleigh saw the tall, lanky figure of his friend and partner rise into view.

"Respect the court! Remove your cap."

The chairman himself wore a battered trilby, and there was not a man in that crowded room without his headgear; yet without demur, and giving a little ironic smile, Purnell removed his cap; and his eyes roved round the room, whilst the shell operator made a windy speech about the necessity of maintaining the customs of civilization even when civilization had been left behind; and then, as his stream of rhetoric began to work thin, checked himself suddenly, and announced abruptly: "I call on Mr. Pete Slackman to set forth ther case for ther prosecution."

Mr. Pete Slackman lifted himself to his full height on the table, glared malevolently at the prisoner, and grinned affably at the assembly. Then he cleared his throat, expectorated, and began:

"Ther facts of ther case are these: A party of men coming up from ther cañon heard two shots fired some way ahead of them, an' as shots mean bullets, an' bullets mean killin' unless the shooter ain't on the mark, they kep a bright look-out as they marched, and after a bit they caught sight of a man kneelin' by another, an' goin' through his pockets an' pack. They watched him for a minute or two till they saw him take from ther pack a little bag which he opened an' tumbled out o' it somethin' that shone bright in ther sunshine—bright an' yellor, gents, for, as yer've already guessed, it was gold. Then they remembered ther shots they'd heard, an' reckonin' they'd tumbled ter the feller's game they collared him, an' brought him up ter Sheep Camp, thinkin' ter deliver him ter the marshal ef there'd been one. But as you know, gents, there ain't; an' so a bunch of honest miners took charge of ther villain, called this meeting, an' delivered ther

prisoner for trial. He stands there lookin' as guilty as Cain, the dust he stole es at ther President's right hand, an' ther man he killed es down on ther trail waitin' sepulchre; an' I reckon that somewhere on these premises ther's a rope strong enough ter stretch him. Them's ther facts of ther case an' I reckon they're 'bout as hard ter get over as ther Chilkoot itself, an' most of us here know just how hard that is. About all yer got ter do, gents of ther jury, es ter pass ther verdict an' fix the rope."

He sat down on the table as he reached this easy conclusion, and with an air of elaborate carelessness began to twist himself a cigarette, whilst from one corner of the room there came a noisy burst of applause. The president let it proceed until Slackman had finished rolling and lighting his cigarette, then he smote the box with his mallet. "Silence in the court, gents!"

There was a burst of laughter, occasioned by the magisterial air assumed by the president; and then as stillness was accorded, a voice spoke up quickly, a voice that startled Ranleigh as he recognized it.

"Who was the man who was shot, Mr. President? We haven't been told that."

Ranleigh lifted himself on tip-toe, and was just able to see the girl Lisette, standing facing the president with a quite fearless look upon her face.

The president looked at his lieutenant, the prosecutor, who politely scrambled to his feet once more to answer. His name had been ascertained from his papers. He was Sverdrup Stefanson, one of Uncle Sam's adopted kids.

"And was he known to the prisoner?"

"Can't say!" was the answer.

"Then what is alleged as the prisoner's motive for the crime?"

Slackman laughed carelessly, and pointed to the

bag at the chairman's right hand. "Gold; I reckon that's motive enough. It is known that Stefanson hed made a strike an' was going out ter raise capital. He talked of his plans here, an' showed that little moosehide bag of coarse gold in this very room!"

"Are you suggesting that the prisoner was here when Stefanson did that?"

"I ain't suggesting nothin'," retorted Slackman; "I'm jest stating facts."

"Then suppose you tell us which way the prisoner was travelling—up or down the trail?"

"Wot's that got ter do with et?" demanded Slackman.

"Well, if he was travelling up the trail and he met Stefanson going down, the inference is obvious. He couldn't——"

"I reckon he was goin' down," interrupted Slackman coolly.

"It is a lie," broke in Purnell himself. "I was coming up the trail, as my Indian packers will testify, and I saw the whole tragedy of Stefanson's killing. I was a little way behind my line of packers, when I saw a man creeping through the willows towards another man who was resting on his pack. I had no idea what was in the fellow's mind, but I fell out of the trail to watch, and I saw the man who was creeping forward shoot the man upon the pack, who was Stefanson——"

"You did, did yer?" interrupted Slackman sarcastically; "an' I suppose yer folded yer arms an' watched—whilst——"

"No! The thing was so sudden that I was startled, but as quickly as I could I drew my pistol and fired at the murderer."

"An' 'it the Chilkoot, I suppose," commented Slackman with a contemptuous laugh.

"I missed, and the murderer ran away."

"He would! Yer ran after him, I reckon?"

"I started to; but Stefanson called out to me and I ran to him instead. He was badly hurt, and not long for this world as he knew, and he told me his name, told me of the gold in his pack—that gold there—told me where—where——"

Purnell visibly hesitated, and the president leaned forward, a tense eager look upon his rough face.

"Yep?" he prompted, a little touch of excitement in his voice. "Yep? He told yer where the gold came from, I guess."

Purnell did not answer immediately. He measured his questioner with calm, searching gaze, then in an odd tone he replied quietly: "He told me where to find the address of his sister, and asked me to see that she got his gold and—er—things."

"He did, did he?" snorted the president. "An' wot else?"

"He gave me some papers, the papers that were taken from me by the scallywags that brought me here," answered Purnell sharply.

"We got ther docyments right enough," said the prosecutor, suddenly taking a hand once more. "But ther question es, did we get all?"

"You did!"

Slackman shook his head. "I reckon we didn't. I bin through them papers, an' there's somethin' missin', an' I reckon yer knows where et es, prisoner at ther bar." He looked round the room. "Is there a gent here who, hevin' made a big strike in an unknown country, as wouldn't afore he left it hev made a plan of ther place? I reckon yer ain't none of yer sich fools; an' I'll lay Sverdrup Stefanson wasn't that particular kind of bughouse ijiut neither. But, gents, in Stefanson's papers there ain't nothin' of the sort;

an' I reckon ther prisoner could tell ther meanin' of thet absence ef he would. If Stefanson wasn't the starkest liar thet ever tried his hand at a fairy-tale, there's half a hill of gold lying somewhere up there ! " He waved a hand northward, and then pointed dramatically to the little moosehide sack on the table. " Thet little sack proves that Sverdrup wasn't no liar. Ther gold's there, an', boys, Purnell there has ther secret of it. 'Twas for that he plugged the Norseman ! "

A rustle of excitement ran through the room as he made this statement. Every man there was on the gold-trail, and as they looked on the moosehide sack that was evidence of the existence of that which had set their feet to far and bitter trails, dull eyes gleamed with sudden eager light, and stolid faces grew intense.

" Half a hill ! " a voice blurted gloatingly. " Make the murdering blighter tell before you stretch him, Pete."

" Hear ! hear ! " chimed in other voices, whilst one growled savagely : " Give him a taste of Indian medicine. Fire-sticks between the fingers an'——"

Slackman broke in on the brutal suggestion. His hand shot out again, with the index finger pointing straight at the girl Lisette.

" This yere young Portia asks for motive. Ain't half a hill of gold motive enough for the killing of a whole township, an' es there a man here who wouldn't——" He checked himself sharply as he saw whither the surge of his own argument was carrying him ; and as some man in the room laughed Holdsworth gripped Ranleigh's arm, and whispered :

" Slackman and the president are after that gold. They want the secret, and they think your partner has it. They mean to get it by hook or crook."

"Yes, and then they'll hang him!"

"Unless the talk of hanging is a bluff to make him speak."

"It's no bluff," was the reply. "Those two ruffians are in dead earnest and there are others with them. We've just got to get Purnell out of this somehow."

## CHAPTER V

### A GET-AWAY

AS Roy Ranleigh made his whispered declaration there was an almost desperate note in his voice, and a look of determination on his face that convinced the sergeant of his resolve to attempt the impossible.

"How is it to be done?" Holdsworth whispered back. "You can't hold up a crowd like this!"

"Listen," replied Ranleigh. "I'm going to chip in, and as soon as I begin, step outside and watch the windows. When the room goes dark, as it will, empty your pistol as fast as you can at the back of the hotel, then run round to the window on the chairman's right."

"You're going to get Purnell out in the stampede?"

"I'm going to try," answered Ranleigh grimly.

"It will be a desperate chance."

"Yes, I know; but——"

He broke off, shrugged his shoulders, and quite suddenly he spoke in a loud voice.

"Mr. President, I have some evidence to lay before the court."

There was a sharp rustle of surprise. Men turned swiftly to look at him. The president rose to his feet to get a better view, whilst for the second time Ranleigh saw a light of ferocious menace gleam in Slackman's eyes. In the hubbub Sergeant Hold-

worth pushed his way through the crowd that blocked the doorway.

For a moment the president did not speak. He flashed a rather uneasy look at his lieutenant, who still glared at the Englishman ; then he began tentatively :

" Well, if the court ain't made up its mind to the verdict——"

" Let the man speak," broke in an English voice. " That's but fair play."

" Hear ! hear ! "

The president nodded. " That's right ! There's no Jeddart justice about this court ! We'll hear evidence first an' hang afterwards. Jest step up to ther witness-stand, my friend."

That was precisely what Ranleigh wanted, and he thrust his way forward until he was standing almost directly under the lamp, and close beside Lisette.

" Go outside," he whispered, " at once."

The girl caught the warning flash of his eyes, and understood that he had some desperate scheme in mind. She nodded and began to make her way to the door ; and as she did so, the man in the chair spoke.

" Name, witness."

" Ranleigh ! "

" A blame Britisher, I guess ? "

" You guess right," retorted Ranleigh, a little heatedly.

" No sass ! " said the president tartly. " What yer got to say against this lawfully constituted miners-meeting stretching that ruddy murderer there ? "

" Well, first, that he isn't a murderer——" Ranleigh broke off and looked towards the door. The girl was just disappearing, and as he noted the fact he continued drawlingly, as if in no hurry : " And, secondly——"



"An' secondly," mimicked Slackman.

"And, secondly," repeated Ranleigh, even more drawlingly than before, "this court is no court to try an honest man."

There was a sharp murmur at this, and one or two angry shouts.

"Why not?" demanded the president. "What yer gettin' at?"

"Just what I say. A court of which the president and the prosecutor are partners in a crooked three-shell game, and——"

"Almighty God!"

The oath came from Pete Slackman. He leaped to his feet and stood upon the table, his eyes blazing, whilst his hand went like lightning to his pistol-holster, and as he dragged out the weapon he shouted: "You lying whelp!"

The crowd in the restaurant swayed suddenly, and as Slackman flung the pistol forward there was a surge backward, the throng striving to carry itself out of harm's way. Slackman sighted deliberately, almost leisurely, a gleam of triumphant malice in his eyes. But in the second before the other man pulled the trigger Ranleigh's arm shot forward, and his clenched fist shivered the porcelain shade of the lamp and the chimney and crashed down on the wick, extinguishing it completely. He ducked to avoid the falling fragments of glass; and that probably saved his life, for in the same second Slackman's pistol barked, stabbing the darkness with flame, and on the heels of the shot there sounded a sudden fusillade outside.

Panic fell on the assembly. Shouts and curses, the stamping of feet and the gasping grunts of struggling men thrusting their way towards the door filled the restaurant with babel sounds, and as the president

began to bellow for order Ranleigh gripped his friend's arm.

"Duck under the table," he shouted in his ears; and, holding each other, they ducked together between the trestles and out on the farther side.

"Strike a match, you doggone——"

As Ranleigh recognized Slackman's voice over his head he paused.

"Heave," he said to his friend.

Purnell understood him, and as the two heaved together the table tilted, and shot both the president and the prosecutor to the floor. Following the crash of the table, the noise of panic trebled. Some man, badly rattled, began to empty his pistol at random, and between the flashes the partners reached the window which Ranleigh had indicated to the sergeant. The latter had already broken all the glass out with the butt of his pistol, and in a twinkling the pair had scrambled through.

"This way," laughed Holdsworth, and at a quick pace led them away from the frame-built hotel, and through the devious ways of the canvas town.

Presently he stopped. "The trail's ahead, but I don't think there's a man in Alaska could make it in the dark. You'll have to make the best of it in the open. Keep straight on till you come to the tall rocks on the right of the trail, and wait for me there. You'll be able to shelter from the wind, and I'll be along with blankets presently. There's going to be a fluffy time down in Sheep Camp to-night."

He turned to go back, and then remembered something. "Where's your outfit?" he asked.

"It's stacked at the nor'-west corner of the camp. We were taking the last packs up when those blackguards gathered me. I expect the packers will collar it and sell it in the morning."

"I think not," laughed the sergeant; and without another word turned and marched off towards the lights of Sheep Camp.

The partners made no delay. Setting their faces to the icy drizzle blowing from the Chilkoot, they began to make their way up the now deserted trail. They did not talk, all their breath being required for the task before them; but when they reached the rocks which Holdsworth had named, and crouching in the lee of them were able to breathe easily, the American spoke abruptly.

"You were in the nick of time, Ranleigh. How did you hear? You weren't in Sheep Camp when those toughs brought me in, were you?"

"No!" Ranleigh answered, and rapidly explained how the news of his friend's arrest had reached him.

"And you started at once to——"

"Yes! Tell me what happened, Purnell!"

"How much did you hear down there?" asked the other.

"All that Slackman said, and all that you told."

"Then you've got most of the story, and the little bit you didn't get is what that precious pair of scoundrels and their backers were after."

"The plan——"

"There isn't any plan. Just a dying man's description of a piece of country hundreds of miles north of Dawson."

"He told you, then?"

"Yes! Rather vaguely. The gold he had with him had come from a small lake up in the Porcupine country——"

"The Porcupine country!" exclaimed his friend in surprise.

"Yes! What is the matter?"

"Nothing! Just an odd coincidence, that's all!"

"The trail is first to the head waters of the river, then up the fourth big creek after passing a chain of lakes which Stefanson didn't know the name of, but which the map will probably show. The creek winds into some big mountains, and in the heart of them the lake is set as in a cup."

"Probably an old crater!"

"Likely enough! Anyway, on one side of that lake there is a hill with a cliff, in which there is a broad vein of gold—if Stefanson's tale is true!"

"You don't doubt it?"

"No! Neither do those blackguards down there." He nodded his head towards Sheep Camp as he spoke. "Stefanson must have talked when he bunked there last night, and the gold in that moosehide poke was testimony to his yarn. Those scoundrels must have got wind of his story, and shot him like a dog in the hope of getting possession of his secret. It all happened just as I told the meeting, but those wolves were sold; for though they collared me and charged me with murder, they didn't get what they were after."

"They were sure there was a plan!"

"Yes! You saw how that scoundrel Slackman played on the cupidity of men crazy for gold. They'd have gone to the length of torture to make me own up, if you hadn't happened along."

"Was there nothing at all in Stefanson's papers to indicate the district he'd been in?"

"I don't know! I never had time to examine them; I'd scarcely shoved them in my pocket, and Stefanson's eyes had only just closed, when the bunch of scoundrels that took me showed up. But apparently there wasn't much that was any use to them."

"It looks that way." Ranleigh was silent for a moment, then he asked suddenly: "How did that girl whom we met in Skagway come into the business?"

"She was on the trail when those blackguards gathered me. We'd gone round to Dyea together on that clanging old kettle they call a steamboat, and we'd talked a bit. She told me how you'd got clear the night before last, and asked a lot of questions about you, the most of which I had to answer with a blank. I suppose she butted in at the meeting to do what she could; though Heaven knows 'twas little enough in a packed meeting like that."

"I thought she was going up the White Pass Trail!"

"Changed her mind when she heard of a landslide on that trail and took the Dyea route as being the quicker, she being in a mortal hurry to get to Dawson before the freeze-up."

"Then we may see her again."

"Maybe! But she's a thruster, and she isn't toting a ton of grub up the trail. In a day she'll gain miles on us, and she'll be running the White Horse before we hit Lake Linderman."

"I hope no harm will come to her down there," Ranleigh said hoarsely, his voice shaking a little. "Those wolves——"

"Daren't touch a hair of her head, I'll swear," broke in Purnell. "If they did there'd be a clean-up in that camp such as it badly needs. Don't worry about her. There's chivalry even in gold-seekers, and a whole lot of those fellows down there would stick up for a woman. Slackman and the crowd who stand in with him know their limits, I'll wager."

Ranleigh made no reply, but sat there in the dark recalling the girl's face and wondering what was the nature of the mystery at which Cavannagh had hinted at the Aurora Hotel. He could not make even the wildest guess; but presently he remembered what the Irishman had hinted about her destination, and he turned quickly towards his friend.

"You'll go after Stefanson's gold, I suppose, Purnell?"

"Yes!" answered the American. "You see, it's a sort of trust from the dead. There's his sister down at Seattle——"

"You know her address?"

"No, nothing beyond Seattle. The full address is in the papers which those blackguards took from me. But it will be possible to get her through an advertisement in the Seattle papers—after we've proved the truth of her brother's story."

"You say *we*?"

"I hope you'll stand in, Ranleigh," said the American hastily. "We were to be partners, and if half of what poor Stefanson said is true, this Porcupine business is a big thing."

"Well, if you think that you would like me to——"

"Like! It is a necessity that I should have some one. Who knows what may happen to a lonely man up in that country? It's just got to be you or some one else."

"Then I stand in to help you to get Stefanson's fortune," answered Ranleigh, without saying anything of the other reason that made the distant Porcupine country attractive to him.

"Right!" said the American cheerfully; "but before we pass the Chilkoot I must send a letter out to that girl."

"I thought you didn't know her address."

"I don't, but I know the address of the Seattle paper; and I can send the letter care of the editor, with an advertisement asking the girl to call for it. I shall enclose a swinging fee; and it will be all right; there never yet was an American news-sheet that refused good business." He laughed as he made this statement, then as an eddy of wind brought a

drizzle of rain into their shelter he crouched closer to the wet rock. "I hope your friend will hurry up with the blankets. If we crouch here very long in this we shall be stiff with rheumatism. I'm chilled to the bone already."

Ranleigh laughed as he shifted his own position. "The Chilkoot is certainly no place in which to spend a night in the rain!"

They fell silent, crouching lower in the rocks as the wind veered a little, and almost an hour had passed with leaden feet, when Purnell started suddenly.

"Hear anything, Ranleigh?"

"No," answered the Englishman.

"I did! There's some one coming up the trail, I'll swear. I hope it isn't any of those precious scoundrels from Sheep Camp."

"Not likely, I should think. If they're trying to get you again they can scarcely have gone through the Camp yet. It will take a few hours to search all the tents there are down there, and——"

"Ah, you are right!" interjected Ranleigh. "There's a body of men coming up the trail. I heard voices in the wind. If it is Holdsworth, there are others with him."

They waited in silence for the men on the trail to appear, Purnell peering over the edge of rock into the night, then on the wet trail he glimpsed a number of burdened figures and suddenly out of the blackness came a hail.

"Ahoy, Ranleigh!"

"Holdsworth!" said the baronet with a sudden relief from tension, and then shouted back: "Ahoy! Ahoy!"

"By Jupiter! He's got the packers with him!" cried Purnell.

"It's awfully good of you, Holdsworth——" began Ranleigh when the sergeant joined them.

"Oh! rot," interrupted the other brusquely. "It isn't safe for either of you two fellows to go down there now. Those scoundrels are combing the camp for you, and if they found you——" He broke off significantly, and then added: "They're a lawless lot."

"Did you see anything of that girl who interfered on Purnell's behalf?" asked Ranleigh.

"No! But she'll be safe enough! No need to worry over her. Just make yourself as snug as you can, so that you'll be fit for the trail at the first glimpse of daylight. The sooner you're the other side the line the better."

After a rest and a smoke the packers started on the return journey to Sheep Camp, and Ranleigh and his friend, snug in their blankets, soon passed into sleep, from which they did not awaken until the sergeant roused them for breakfast.

"Eat," he said, "as fast as you can, and swallow the coffee hot. You'll need it, for there's a blistering wind coming down from the snow-field."

Whilst they breakfasted he gave advice. "When you start, push on as fast as you can. One or two lots of men have already gone on up the trail, and they may belong to the gang who run the camp down there; I don't know. But 'ware ambushes as you go, and if there's trouble don't hesitate to shoot. Remember there's no law on this side of the Chilkoot, and you won't be really safe till you're past the police-post at the summit. The only law that runs on this side is that of the gun and the quickest draw, so be prepared."

"Right!" laughed Purnell cheerfully; and quarter of an hour later they were clambering up the trail with their heads bent low to shield them from Chilkoot's icy breath.



## CHAPTER VI

## OVER THE SUMMIT

THE wind before which they bowed seemed to come straight down from a sky of steel, for whilst looking back the Dyea Cañon was yet in shadow, the sky above was bright with dawn, and beneath it the storm-shattered height of Chilkoot towered grey and grim like some mighty sentinel.

As the light broadened they saw the long train of men already taking the trail from Sheep Camp, and Purnell waved his arm downward.

"We're ahead of most of the horde, anyhow!"

"But we don't quite head the procession," answered Ranleigh, pointing to heights where showed a white stretch of ice above the Scales, across which three ant-like figures were crawling.

"No," agreed the American, and paused long enough to unship and adjust a pair of binoculars which he carried slung over his shoulders. He lifted them to his eyes, and then gave a whistle.

"Phew!" He thrust the glasses towards his friend. "Take a look, Ranleigh."

The baronet took the glasses and examined the three figures crossing the ice. Then he started.

"You recognize them, Ranleigh," laughed the other. "That girl and her Indians know how to travel. Either they must have hit the trail last night, or they were one of the lots who passed our camp in the dark."

"Yes," said Ranleigh in an odd tone of disappointment that made his friend glance at him sharply.

Purnell smiled to himself. "You would sooner she was behind us, Roy."

"I was hoping that we might see her at the summit, as she passed over," argued Ranleigh quietly.

"Well, that's off now! She's the equivalent of miles ahead of us, and we're not likely to catch her dust again for a while."

"No! Probably not till we reach the Porcupine country."

"The Porcupine." The American stared at him incredulously. "What has she got to do with the Porcupine country?"

Ranleigh laughed at the expression on his friend's face.

"I don't know. It's something of a mystery. But she's surely breaking the trail for us that way, or Cavannagh, the landlord of the Aurora down in Dyea, is the biggest liar that ever came out of Ireland." Purnell whistled thoughtfully. "It looks as if there were other people who knew what Stefanson knew."

"Possibly! I don't know. But somewhere in the triangle of country that lies between the bend of the Porcupine as it turns south-west to join the Yukon that girl is domiciled—with her father."

Purnell was plainly a little staggered by the information. "But Stefanson said nothing——"

"He probably didn't know. It's a big stretch of country by the map, and an army could be lost there."

"And yet you hope to meet——"

"I shall make the meeting if I cross-cut the triangle, and comb every patch of wood in it."

To this emphatic statement Purnell made no reply, but glanced thoughtfully towards the three figures just moving from the white stretch towards a patch of shattered rock. They disappeared behind it whilst he watched, and then as he glanced towards the summit of the pass, and thought of the northward trail beyond, he speculated on his friend's chances of ever meeting the girl again. To him they seemed remote enough, but he did not say so; and in silence they

continued on their way, each wrapped in his own thoughts.

They were well on their road, and lulled into a sense of almost complete security, when the untoward thing happened. From behind a pitch of rock fantastically piled on the left of the trail a man's head suddenly appeared, and a second later was followed by a hand holding a Smith and Wesson.

"Put 'em up!" roared an ugly voice.

Purnell, who was leading, had no choice but to obey; but it was otherwise with the Englishman. Like a shot he dropped behind a convenient boulder, and hidden from sight of the man with the pistol, drew his own weapon, and began to wriggle swiftly into a strategic position. The training of other years on the Indian Frontier, where he had engaged in more than one little war, served him well. Not once did he betray himself, and he was ensconcing himself in an almost impregnable position when the ugly voice roared again.

"Come outa it, yer durned *cheechako*! Think I don't see you, do yer; but I'll show yer——"

A pistol cracked suddenly, and the bullet ricocheted from the rocks in a totally different direction from that where Ranleigh lay. The Englishman laughed softly to himself. This game of the rocks was one that he knew very well how to play, and he was as cool as the snow on Chilkoot's head. Lying behind a tangle of boulders, he squinted through a narrow opening, the while he listened, hoping that the enemy would unmask in full force. He caught an exchange of words.

"One of 'em got away, ther cuss! But ther feller wot talked ter Stefanson es here."

"Bring ther kid round! He's our meat anyway." There were apparently but two men on the ambus-

cade, and looking through his chink Ranleigh saw that now the man who had challenged them had carelessly stepped clear of cover. Silently he slid his pistol into the opening, sighted, and waited.

"Step thes way, lively, kid, an' keep 'em up, or——"  
The man waved his pistol in dramatic gesture, and before Purnell could take a step forward, the Englishman fired.

The desperado dropped his pistol with a yell, and spun half-way round; whilst his companion, cursing luridly, showed the rim of his hat round the corner of the rock pile. Purnell still stood with his hands above his head, and the wounded man explained from the ground.

"Et's ther other dandy. Back o' ther stones on the left. I saw ther smoke of his gun."

As this piece of information was given the rim of hat was withdrawn, plainly whilst its owner gave himself to thought, and Ranleigh himself had an inspiration. Moving quickly, he removed his own hat, and placing it on a stone elevated the stone till the crown of the hat would just show above the line of the boulder in front, then he crept back to his vantage-point. The trick was a very old one, but guessing that the desperadoes regarded him as a tenderfoot, who would never think of the ruse, Ranleigh waited for the result of his stratagem.

Half a minute passed, and then the wounded man rolled out of sight; and a few seconds later a head and a hand holding a pistol were thrust round the wall of rock, and a lightning shot was made at the hat. The bullet glanced from the boulder in front; but before Ranleigh could sight and fire, his friend took action. At the very second of firing, whilst the spurt of flame still showed at the muzzle of the ruffian's pistol, Purnell leaped forward, and struck

the fellow a terrific blow which, catching the muscles of the arm, caused him to release his pistol, and the next moment the two were grappling and struggling.

Ranleigh wasted no time. Forsaking the screening boulders, he ran to the rocks behind which in their struggle Purnell and his antagonist had whirled. As he swung round the bastion a single glance told him that his friend was master of the ruffian with whom he grappled, and that he had driven him against a rock, over which the aggressor was bending back, a look of agony upon his face. But that glance showed him something else. The wounded man, having risen to his feet, had drawn a knife, and holding it in his left hand was advancing to the help of his companion. He stopped dead as he caught sight of Ranleigh with the pistol in his hand, and the Englishman gave a laconic command.

"Drop it!"

The man understood him, and instantly let the knife slide from his hand.

"Hands up! Face that wall there! Quick!"

The man lifted up his once serviceable hand and placed himself in the position indicated, just as a yell of agony came from his companion. Moving forward, Ranleigh saw a strained, anguished look upon the face of the man whom Purnell was pressing backward over a sharp ridge of rock, and there was a light of quite horrified anticipation in the fellow's eyes. Ranleigh in his soldiering days had once seen a man in precisely the same position, and knew that the fellow was expecting his spine to snap; whilst the savage, resolute look on Purnell's face gave him no reason to hope for mercy.

As Ranleigh moved into the range of his vision the man shot an agonized look of appeal towards him; and though unquestionably the rascal deserved

even the terrible thing that he was anticipating, the baronet, realizing that there were other ways of scotching the ruffian's activities, responded to the appeal. Setting his pistol to the fellow's head, he spoke to the American.

"Let go, Purnell! The game's in our hands!"

Purnell heard and obeyed him. The savage tenseness of his face relaxed; and as he released his hold he gasped for breath, and then laughed almost drunkenly.

"I've never killed a man," he said, "but——"

He broke off, and watched the desperado straighten himself painfully, then he laughed again. Ranleigh took command.

"Just gather up those two pistols, Purnell, and then run your hands over these fellows, and see if there are any concealed weapons."

The American obeyed him, and brought to light a small automatic pistol and a second knife. As he laid them on a flat rock he asked curiously: "What are you going to do with the scoundrels, Ranleigh?"

"Tie them up, and put them behind those boulders there, if they tell me the truth. If not I shall shoot them. But we'll tie them up first. Just take their belts and scarves and bind them, Purnell. Quick as you can, or some of their friends may happen along."

Purnell worked quickly, and when his task was ended the desperadoes were quite scientifically pinioned. Then the Englishman spoke.

"Who put you on this game?" he demanded.

"No one," said the one whom Ranleigh had saved from a terrible fate. "We just saw you comin' along, an' takin' yer for a couple of *cheechakos*, thought we'd lift your dollars!"

Ranleigh cocked his pistol. "I want the truth," he said sharply, "and I mean to have it, or——" He raised the pistol significantly, and there was a still

cold look in his grey eyes that told the desperado that he was not to be played with. "Was it Slackman and that partner of his?"

The ruffian flashed a glance at the pistol, and then met the steady grey eyes, and nodded.

"Yep!"

"They want to get my friend here?"

"Yep!"

"Why?"

"Well now, stranger, yer knows thet just as well as me."

"Maybe I do, but I want to hear it from you."

"Well, et's thet plan of Stefanson's mine thet Slackman wants, an' he means ter get et."

"I thought so!"

Ranleigh looked at his friend. "No need to waste more time, Purnell. We'll just hide these fellows in the rocks and go on our way."

"Don't! for ther love of heaven, don't!" pleaded the ruffian. "We'll die there. Tie our hands an' send us down the trail instead. We'll have a chance then."

Ranleigh shook his head. "You'll have chances in plenty before two hours are past. The procession will be along presently, and you have only got to shout."

"A fat lot yer know, if yer think that," broke in the wounded man in a voice in which truculence and appeal were oddly blended. "These durned gold-rushers are jest mad. They'd let us howl ourselves dumb without turnin' aside ter peep at us. Honest, boys, we're stiff uns if yer leave us——"

"We're going to leave you, and now," answered Ranleigh resolutely. "Some of your own tribe are sure to drift up the trail looking for you before the day is over, and if they don't—well, that is your look-out."

Recognizing the futility of further appeal the man said no more, and within ten minutes the two men, bound and helpless but not gagged, were lying side by side in a tangle of rocks, well hidden from sight of the trail. The man with whom Purnell had struggled looked round as he was deposited within the rocks, then he swore.

"D—— yer! Yer mean us to frizzle in the sun an' freeze in the dark."

"Oh!" said Purnell, "it won't be as bad as that. It will be a bit warm presently, but if the wind should come through that gullet it will be cool enough——"

"I'll hev' yer pelt for this, some day!" cried the man in futile wrath.

"You're welcome to it when you can take it," laughed the American, "and that won't be for an hour or two."

"If et's a hundred years——" began the man through gnashing teeth.

"Leave the ruffian!" said Ranleigh sharply. "It's time we were on our way. There may be other birds of this flock about."

They resumed their journey, and as they did so Purnell asked: "Do you think there are any others of the gang in front of us, Roy?"

"I should say no! Slackman and his crowd may think we are still in Sheep Camp, and they probably sent those fellows up the trail by way of precaution. But there's no telling; and if those scoundrels get loose soon it won't be long before the pack is on our trail. We must push on. Once we're past the summit we shall be out of reach of these bandits. The police-post is like a water-shed, with crime and lawlessness on this side and law and order on the other."

They marched for an hour and a half, and then seated themselves in a sheltered place to rest. From



their vantage-point they could see that the head of the long line of burdened men had long passed the scene of their encounter with Slackman's confederates, and as he marked the fact the Englishman spoke.

"I wonder if anyone has found that brace of gaol-birds yet?"

"Bound to have, I should think. Those guys would shout their hardest, and would pitch a tale to some good-hearted Samaritan who——" He broke off sharply as something sang overhead. "What was that?"

"Bullet!" answered Ranleigh calmly. "Lie down, and try and find where it came from. I didn't think there was anyone within shooting distance."

They slipped from the rock on which they had been seated; and crouching in the lee of it, surveyed the backward trail. A slight haze, like a dispersing wisp of smoke, seemed to hang over a bend in the trail that commanded the point where they had been seated. With the binoculars, Purnell examined the place carefully; and presently picked out a man lying flat on a rock with a rifle in his hand. He indicated the sportsman to his friend.

"He is the only one as far as I can make out; and if we push on, unless he has the luck to pot us, he can't possibly overtake us. The question is, shall we bolt for it?"

"Better, I think. If we delay, others may join him. In which case——"

"Then we'll quit. If we get safely round the corner there, the fellow won't be able to pot at us for quite a long time. But that's a nasty bit! We shall be like flies on a wall."

The nasty bit he indicated was a place where the trail ran dizzily across the cliff-like face of the hill.

It was not a long stretch, but to cross it, with the knowledge that a marksman was trying to pick them off, was likely to be a nerve-racking experience.

"Zip! Zip! Zip!"

They heard the bullets as they struck the rocky face, though the sound of the firing was lost in the wind. Once Ranleigh, who was leading, caught a sharp exclamation that made him look swiftly round, apprehensive for his friend.

"All right!" shouted the American. "Don't stand, or——"

"Zip!"

The vicious sound, close to his head, pointed the moral, and, assured that his friend was all right, Ranleigh hurried forward, and soon they were safely across the dangerous piece of trail. As he drew breath the baronet looked at Purnell, and saw a trickle of blood running down his face.

"Good heavens, man, you're hit."

"A splinter of rock," answered Purnell coolly.

"No need to waste time, and no time to waste. That sportsman means that Slackman and his crowd have found that brace of rascals we left in the rocks, and they're after us. We've just got to drive."

They drove their hardest up that heart-breaking trail to the summit, panted past a broken-winded Argonaut who had spent the night on the trail, and who wondered at their haste whilst he envied their power to make it, then quite suddenly they came in sight of the police-post, with the flag taut in the wind. At the welcome sight they slackened speed. Purnell looked backward on the trail. Except for the toiling Argonaut, there was no one in sight, though an army of packers was already on its way. He laughed exultantly.

"By Jupiter, we've done it!"

"Yes!" answered Ranleigh. "And Slackman and his crowd are left out in the frost."

Then they moved towards the little police-post, with its strip of bunting, symbol round the world of the power that in the wildest places makes for justice and ordered peace.

## CHAPTER VII

### THROUGH THE CAÑON

**E**XACTLY three weeks later, in a boat which they had purchased from a man whose partner had fallen sick, Ranleigh and his friend pushed off from the beach at Linderman on the great water-trail to the North. The start was not an easy one. A stiff wind, almost a gale, was blowing straight on the beach, lifting the water nastily, and with Ranleigh in gum-boots pushing the boat into deeper water, and Purnell at the oars, it was all that they could do to get away. Again and again the boat was flung back on the beach, and it was only on the fifth attempt that they won clear, and then, hoisting a blanket for sail, were enabled to move down the lake.

Between Linderman and Lake Bennett they lined the boat down the connecting river, portaging the most of their outfit and grub for safety, a task which occupied them two whole days; and, afloat once more, at Windy Arm were caught by terrific winds, and in spite of all their efforts were driven ashore and narrowly escaped complete disaster. It was impossible to re-launch the boat for the next twenty-four hours, the iron wind sending the water before it in such force that they must inevitably have been swamped had they made the attempt.

But the delay brought its compensation; for wandering rather disconsolately, watching the various

craft that, ably handled, managed to escape the lee shore on which he and his partner had been driven, Ranleigh came unexpectedly upon a little tent pitched on a small bay. A broken and battered boat was dragged up above the watermark, and there had evidently been some attempt to patch it. Thinking to himself that here was some one who had suffered the disaster which had almost overtaken Purnell and himself, he went forward ; and as he did so, the tent-fly was opened, and standing there he saw the girl Lisette. For a moment he stared at her incredulously, then with gladness in his eyes he went forward.

" You ! " he cried wonderingly. " You ! "

" Yes," she answered, as he thought a little wearily, " stranded." He glanced at the broken boat, noticed the tired look in her hazel eyes, then he said quickly : " But surely you are not alone, Miss Lisette ? "

" No," she answered. " Nanook is with me, but he is rather helpless, having met with an accident. My other Indian has gone on to Dawson."

" Alone ? " he asked, looking at the broken boat, and wondering by what means he had been able to leave.

" He went with a party of gold-seekers, who agreed to give him a passage when they learned that he could steer them through the Cañon and the White Horse."

" He left you——" began Ranleigh stormily.

" I sent him," broke in the girl with a smile. " It was essential that he should reach Dawson before the freeze-up, carrying with him that for which we had journeyed to Skagway. If he had delayed here until now he would not have been able to do it, and Nanook could not be left alone, so I ordered the other one to go."

Her words awakened a quick feeling of dismay in

Ranleigh. He looked at the stormy water, then he asked quickly : " You really think that Dawson can't be reached on open water, now ? "

" Look at that rock there ; where the sun does not reach it the ice shows upon it. Look at the hills. Since we have been here I have watched the snow line descending steadily on them. Winter is already coming up there ; soon it will be on the lakes and rivers, closing them to navigation. You will not get to Dawson before the river freezes. See, there is another sign."

She looked up and he followed her gaze. A flock of geese in echelon were flying down wind towards the Southland.

" For a fortnight the birds have been going," she said. " Day after day I have seen them, and I have heard their honking in the night ! And they are very early in their migration, which means that winter is already moving down the lakes and waterways where they nested in the spring. Soon will come the snow and the bitter cold."

Ranleigh did not question her judgment. That she knew the land and its ways and seasons as he did not, he was convinced ; and as he thought of the long trail to Dawson, with the waterway closing, he was a little perturbed. But he did not show it ; instead, he looked towards the tent.

" Your Indian is there ? " he asked.

" Yes, with a crushed shoulder and a broken arm. A doctor with the police did what he could, and wanted him to go back to the hospital ; but he would not, and so we remained here. In a few days we shall start for the North again."

Roy Ranleigh eyed the broken boat critically. " Not in that craft, I think, Miss Lisette."

" Oh, we shall repair——"

"You'll never take it through the Cañon if all they say of it is true; and even if you did, it would go to pieces in the White Horse——" He broke off, then said quickly:

"There is a better way than to take a mad risk of that kind."

"A better way?"

"Yes, come with me and——" He interrupted himself as he caught the expression on her face. "Please don't misunderstand me! It is an almost selfish offer. You seem to know the ways of this country, and you have probably been through the Cañon——"

"Four times," she broke in with a smile.

"Then you must see how useful you might be to a couple of *cheechakos*, with a boat that is too big for them. We could make your Indian comfortable, and with you to help we might race the winter——"

"I do not think that is possible," she interrupted. "You do not know how fast winter comes in the North. You may get well on the way if you are fortunate, but somewhere this side of Dawson you will be held up in the ice."

"Well," he asked smilingly, "will you help us so far on the way, Miss Lisette?"

A thoughtful look came on the beautiful face. It was a little time before the girl spoke, then she said: "I do not think I ought to burden you with a sick man."

"Your help will more than compensate," he answered eagerly.

"Well, if you think that——"

"I do most emphatically," he answered joyfully.

"It will make a great difference to me," she owned. "Nanook will not be able to row for weeks; and the sled journey from here to Dawson and to"——she

broke off, and corrected herself—"to Dawson and beyond would be terrible. It will make a great difference to us, if before winter we can be well upon our way."

Ranleigh noticed her correction and wondered why she should conceal her destination, but he gave no sign of having done so. Instead he asked urgently: "Then you will come?"

"Yes," she answered simply.

"I am very glad that you agree," he said, "and I am sure my partner will be. We shall start as soon as the wind abates or shifts. It will be easy enough to bring the boat down here, and once we're off on the lake the wind won't matter."

"Then I think I must begin to prepare for the journey," said the girl with a smile. "I shall have some packing, and I must prepare Nanook."

Ranleigh understood that he was dismissed, and raised his cap. "And I must prepare my partner," he said, adding with a laugh, "and pray for the wind to drop."

As he turned and walked back his step was light, and elation shone in his eyes. The wind that smote him, making him bend his head before it, no longer stirred him to irritation; instead, as he visioned the long journey to Dawson in the company of the girl whom he had just left, he was almost grateful to it for casting him on the lee shore. When he entered the tent, which was shaking and straining in the blast, Purnell looked up from a book he was reading, and seeing the elation in his eyes, asked quickly: "What's up, Roy?"

"I've just picked up a pilot to Dawson," he answered with a laugh.

"A pilot?"

"Yes, and a passenger! The pilot knows the Cañon

and the White Horse, and if I know her will run us through like one o'clock."

"Her?"

"Yes! The girl whom we met in Skagway, who ran me to Dyey, and who butted in to help you at Sheep Camp."

"Seems a ubiquitous sort of person," commented Purnell with a laugh.

"I hope you don't mind, Purnell. She's been wrecked, and the Indian who is with her has been hurt. He's rather helpless, and if she waits here with him it is a case of her going over the ice to Dawson. No girl ought to do that!"

"Sure not!" said Purnell with a little laugh.

"I made the offer. I knew you would agree."

"Can't do anything else," replied Purnell, laughing once more. "We seem fairly tangled up with this maid of the wilds, and can't escape her nohow. It must be Fate." He looked at his friend rallyingly, then he asked: "Did she tell you that she was going on to the Porcupine?"

"No! That seems to be a secret. She merely mentioned going beyond Dawson."

"There's some mystery," said Purnell musingly. "But, speaking broadly, we know her secret destination——"

"And we'll keep the knowledge to ourselves, if you don't mind, Purnell."

It was towards noon the following day when the wind permitted the launching of the boat, and an hour later, with Nanook comfortably established in the stern and the two friends at the oars, they took the water-trail once more, with the girl at a steering-sweep taken from her own boat.

In broad noonday they approached the cañon on



Fifty-mile River. They passed half a dozen boats and scows moored to the bank, and looking over his shoulder, Ranleigh saw men running along the land-trail, and from the shore some one shouted a warning, gesticulating madly and pointing to the river ahead. The girl waved her hand serenely, then she spoke quietly :

"The Box ! We come to it. Pull hard, hard as you can." Her hazel eyes were dancing with excitement, and though there was a set look upon her beautiful face, there was in it no sign of fear. Ranleigh himself was conscious of a tense feeling at his heart ; and as the current gripped them, and the banks began to slide by at amazing speed, he heard Purnell slip an oath that betrayed excitement. They swept round a bend, and again, her slight form swaying on the steering-sweep, the girl cried out :

"Pull. Oh ! Pull !"

Ranleigh put all his weight and strength into the stroke, and the boat leaped forward like a racehorse. One single glance only he fetched over his shoulder, and had an impression of a high wall of rock, upon which, as it seemed, they were rushing to destruction.

But in the front of that bastion there was a break, gloomy as the mouth of hell, a break into which the quickened river hurled itself in a mad charge. The Cañon was but a fraction of the river's width, and forced the hurrying water into a ridge which in the centre was several feet high ; a ridge that itself was a succession of white waves like a mane. And to make the Cañon safely it was necessary to ride that fluid hog-back, to hit it in the centre, and to keep the boat straight to the farther end of the gorge. Once off the ridge, no craft could survive destruction ; once in the water, not even the strongest swimmer could hope to live.

Ranleigh was aware of this; but watching the girl's face, he had no distrust. It was calm, resolute, capable, and though he knew that for the next few minutes the lives of all in the boat were in her hands, he had no fear. Those hands, small as they were, seemed to be made of steel, and swayed the steering-oar in unison with the rowers' strokes as easily as if it had been a feather. Then quite suddenly a tense look came in her eyes.

"Pull!" she cried, and bent herself to the sweep.

Their boat leaped into the Cañon's maw. The daylight seemed to fade swiftly, and the clash of thunderous waters filled the air. Black walls, moss-stained, towered on either side of them, half hidden from their gaze by clouds of flying, ice-cold spray. Through that spray, which at the first leap for the ridge had drenched him to the skin, Roy Ranleigh glimpsed the girl, calm, alert, confident, plying the steering-oar serenely as if she were crossing a duck-pond, and he marvelled at the sight, the while he toiled at the oar as never did galley-slave in the ancient world. Then the spray struck him again in a smothering shower, making him gasp and hiding her from view.

The boat seemed at one moment to progress in a succession of leaps, then it plunged and rolled and twisted like a helpless creature in the grip of some savage beast of prey. It seemed impossible that any craft could survive the battering of those wild waters caged in the black walls, waters whose roaring filled that narrow place with demoniacal sound—as if like sentient beasts they sought to shake with their roaring the nerves of those who challenged them.

Time ceased to exist, life resolved itself into frightful hurling forward, the impact of varying sensations being worse than any that man ever experienced in the vivid madness of nightmare. Helplessness and a

consciousness of a chained fear waiting to break its chain and utterly unman him, with a horror of that mad babel of the waters reverberating from the towering walls, were the sensations of which Ranleigh was most conscious as for dear life he swung at the oar ; and the boat shot by boulders that smashed the waters in their impact, or skirted whirlpools whose slithering swirls were like the tentacles of octopi feeling blindly for their prey. A last gust of spray swept over him, the fiendish din seemed to fade suddenly, the twilight of that gut of hell gave place to noonday once more, and as the river opened, the baronet swept the water from his eyes and looked at Lisette, the pilot. He saw her through a cloud of rainbow light made by the moisture on his eyelashes. The tenseness of her figure was now a little relaxed, and she was smiling, as skilfully she steered the boat through the whirlpools into which the waters twisted themselves as they were released from the prisoning Cañon. To Ranleigh she seemed like a goddess, a——

"Great Jove!" Purnell's voice broke on his thoughts, "we've lived through eternity and are now back in time." The American laughed a trifle weakly, revealing the strain he had undergone, and then the girl gave a little laugh.

"There is the White Horse below. We have yet to ride the Mane."

"But it can't be as bad as the Cañon," broke in Purnell.

"It is quite as bad ; a little worse, I think ; and at any rate more men have been lost there ; and more boats wrecked."

"You don't seem afraid of its kick, anyway," said the American admiringly.

Lisette Ranleigh blushed and laughed as she explained : "I have ridden the Mane four times."

"Then we shall get through," said Roy Ranleigh with conviction. "But suppose we work down the river and take a look at the rapids."

"Better drive through without looking," laughed Purnell. "Maybe we shall get cold feet."

"No! Not with Miss Lisette to pilot us," asserted Ranleigh, with such a flame of admiration in his eyes as he looked at her that the girl could not meet it, but turned aside with a little confused laugh.

They re-embarked, and a little later landed to look at the dreaded rapids. The girl explained the situation.

"The rocks across there throw the water over to this side, and it goes through the narrowed passage like—well, you see how!"

"Yes!" said the American.

"You have to follow the current, and ride the Mane. If you miss, there are rocks and the whirlpool."

"I see," said Purnell dryly.

Ranleigh and he looked at the tossing chaos of waters that was the Mane, white and foaming and terrific. It seemed impossible that any boat could ride that crest to the still waters below. Yet the thing was done daily by men who had never seen that dreadful water flume before, and the girl had done it four times!

Looking at her, Ranleigh hoped that the qualms he himself felt did not show in his face. Three years before he had led a charge of native levies up a rocky hill to some stone nullahs, from which barbaric tribesmen rained lead upon them, and at the end had met their impact with long, heavy, Afghan knives. That had been a hair-raising experience, yet the very daring of it had kindled exhilaration. But here was a task that set a chill on the heart and shook the will, blanching the faces of men who hitherto had wrought heroically.

cally with a gay recklessness. Even whilst they were standing there one of a party of men whose boat was drawn up a little way from their own approached them.

"You are taking stock of it?" he inquired in a cultured voice.

"Yes!" answered Ranleigh.

"I've been doing so for twelve hours, and I can't bring myself to it," owned the other without shame. "The longer I look the worse it gets."

"Great Jehoshaphat, yes!" broke in the American. "The sooner we're off the better, Roy. If I stop here long I'll surely strike roots. If you're ready, Miss Lisette, I'm as ready as I ever shall be! Glory, but this place gets one's nerves!"

"But surely you are not going to take the lady through?" protested the stranger.

"No!" answered Ranleigh with a short laugh. "She's going to take us through. She's the pilot!"

They moved towards their boat, and after the girl had issued directions they pushed off into the stream. Purnell's face, though he did not know it, was grey under its tan, and under the golden moustache Roy Ranleigh's teeth were biting his lower lip. The girl's face showed no sign of fear, and though her dark eyes were bright with excitement they were perfectly steady. The stranger looked at her in wonder, then he doffed his cap.

"Good luck!" he cried. "If you make it with a girl, then, by Heaven, I'll follow."

A moment later they felt the suck of the current, and were swung forward at an amazing pace. The boat began to leap and plunge, and the spray came in a cloud, and as yet they had not reached the Mane. Then it leaped again, and was in a smother thrown off by the angry water, and they were on the ridge heading for the plunge below.

A single mistake on the part of the girl at the steering-oar, and they would slip off the wild crest into the deadly whirlpool, perhaps to be cast out across the Mane, instead of fronting it, a mishap which meant disaster, a savage pounding against rocks, and the stillness of death in the quiet waters below.

But the girl made no mistake. Plying her oar steadily, she took the boat through the wildly rioting water. The spray was worse than the heaviest rain. The mad waves leaping to destroy them broke on board drenchingly, and half filled the boat. They were tossed as a leaf is tossed in the wind. There were seconds when to Ranleigh it seemed that they were thrown out of the water altogether; brief moments when he was convinced that the next instant they must crash to destruction. The whole thing was a matter of minutes, but years seemed to elapse, years filled with the crash of waters, the roar of titanic surges, the mad leapings of a terrific dance of death; and he was almost incredulous when they emerged from that pandemonium of raging water, into the quiet eddies below.

In the terrific passage the girl's hair had worked loose, and as she brushed a wet strand back from her face she met Ranleigh's eyes and laughed, and as he heard that laugh clear as bells through the roar of the rapids behind, the man's heart went out to her completely.

"We must land," she said lightly, "and build a fire to dry our clothing; also to attend to Nanook."

And when they landed Purnell looked back on the way that they had come. Then he laughed a little shakily.

"And back down there in the States," he commented, "people pay a quarter to ride the water-shute! If they could come up here——" He broke

off without finishing, then he doffed his soaking cap. "Miss Lisette," he said with heartfelt admiration, "you're sure the starriest performer I ever saw!"

Whereat Lisette Ranleigh laughed once more.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FREEZE-UP

**L**AKE LA BARGE, ringed with noble mountains, was the next landmark of the trail; and Ranleigh and his party made it, under a dull sky with a bitter wind blowing from the North, a wind that chilled them to the bone, and which froze the water on the oars and the boat. Two whole days were consumed in rowing to the outlet of Thirty-mile River, a raging impatient stream, set between high bluffs, sown with dangerous rocks, and twisting capriciously on its wild course. But the girl's knowledge of the trail saved them from the perils that lurked in its tumultuous length; and at last they pitched camp, by the main river trail.

There was ice in shore, thin rim ice which shot out tentative spikelets, and as they prepared the evening meal a gust of snow drove against the spruce woods from the farther side of the river.

"What did I tell you?" said the girl, as the snow came. "The winter is travelling South. There will be ice upon the river before we pass the Big Salmon, and if we are not frozen in before we reach Selkirk we shall be fortunate."

"Then we shall have to abandon the boat, and go over the ice."

"But you will need dogs?"

"We shall be our own dogs until we can buy them," said Ranleigh with a laugh. "We prepared for

eventualities. There are the parts of a big sledge in the outfit ready for putting together."

"But you do not understand the bitterness of the winter trail; the deep snow, and the cruel wind, and you cannot possibly drag two tons of grub——"

"We shall cache part of it, and go on till we can buy dogs; then relay the rest of the outfit."

"You have thought of everything," said the girl suddenly.

"No," answered Ranleigh, "we did not anticipate quite everything. We never thought of you; and now——"

"Yes?" said the girl in naïve innocence.

"I for one shall never forget!" he answered in low tones, the earnestness of which startled her.

The dark eyes turned to him in swift interrogation; and as they met his own steadily, by the flame of the fire, he saw a sudden light gleam in their depths. It glowed and passed like summer lightning; but Roy Ranleigh had seen it, and for the moment he had much ado to keep from voicing the surging emotion that shook him. Before he could speak again the girl asked a swift question:

"When you get to Dawson you will remain there?"

"No!" he answered. "We go beyond to the Porcupine country."

"To the Porcupine?" she echoed in a startled voice.

"Yes," he answered promptly. "Do you know that river?"

She nodded quietly. "I have been the whole length of it, and once made a winter traverse from the eastern branch to Rampart House."

For a fleeting instant after she had spoken, Ranleigh visioned the map and told himself that the girl must have marched right across the big triangle of which



Cavannagh had spoken, then he said quickly: "You are quite a traveller, Miss Lisette."

"It was when we were short of food, and the caribou did not come two winters ago," she explained quite simply. "The Indians were starving, so we went for stores."

He waited, hoping that the girl would continue, but she fell into a musing silence; and again Roy Ranleigh found himself wondering who she was and what was her relation to the Indians who had accompanied her to the coast, and to those of whom she spoke. Suddenly a possible explanation came to him, which he proceeded to put to the test.

"The 'we' included your father, I suppose, Miss Lisette?"

"No," she answered. "Besides myself it included Nanook and the other Indian who has gone ahead to Dawson. My father could not go, being too busy among the hunger-bitten ones——"

"Ah! he is a missionary?"

The girl laughed merrily. "No!" she replied, "scarcely that!"

He looked at her, hoping she would satisfy his curiosity; but the girl did nothing of the kind. Instead, her face grew thoughtful and a reserved silence falling upon her, he was left wondering what her father could be. Store-keeper, fur-trader, gold-miner? Any one of them was possible; but Cavannagh's hints of mystery and the girl's reserve somehow put the probability of all of them aside, and yet opened out no other lines that he could think of.

And there the mystery remained. As they followed the river trail from day to day, frequent opportunities of conversation were given; but whilst Lisette talked freely of the life of the North, showing intimate acquaintance with it in all its phases, not a word escaped her

that did anything to elucidate the problem she herself presented ; nor any word that gave so much as a hint of the reason for her father dwelling in the cold solitude of the Circle.

Driving with the current, the work largely automatic, he had much leisure for thought ; and often his eyes sought the girl's face as if there he might find some explanation of the mystery. But none was forthcoming. Of one thing he was convinced, and that was that if the girl was of mixed race, the mixing was so remote as to have almost worked itself out. Her beauty drew him like a magnet. He knew that for him there was no other woman in the wide world ; and when the thought of Edith van Corlow came to him, as now and again it did, he was humiliated to think that ever he should have dreamed of a mercenary marriage. Now, if all the van Corlow millions were to be her dowry, he would not marry Edith—could not ; for this girl in the moosehide tunic had moved him so deeply that mere money had ceased to count.

He found himself contrasting the sheltered, pampered life lived by a belle of New York society with the bleak, strenuous, adventurous life of the girl who had faced the Box Cañon without a flicker of the eyelids ; and who had ridden the White Horse Rapids with a serene confidence that even yet amazed him when he thought of it ; and in the contrast it was the elemental that appealed to him. And more than once he visioned the two faces side by side : Edith van Corlow's languidly fair, that of a spoiled beauty, sure of her tribute of men's eyes ; and Lisette's, eagle-like in its alertness, and in its faultless symmetry at once beautiful and strong. The prize of the contrast did not lie with the heiress of the van Corlow millions. It went to this girl of the wilderness, inured to harsh ways of life ; and fit to be a man's

true mater rather than a pampered toy, a girl to unseal the deepest springs of a man's heart. And about her there was mystery, a fact which made her infinitely more alluring.

As they drifted on he wondered what he would do when the hour of parting came, as in a little time it must. The more he dwelt upon her, the more inconceivable did it become that she could go out of his life for ever. At all costs he must prevent that; must somehow draw her into a relationship that would keep them in touch with each other, though for a time the wilderness might separate them.

To this end, when they camped at the end of a long day's journey, and the girl would tramp the river-bank to get the stiffness from her limbs, he invariably accompanied her; seeking to win for himself a place in her life and thought. Brave and strong as she was, inured to hardship, and experienced in the savage life of the wilderness, he knew that she could never be one of those numerous women who require a man to cherish them. She was too self-reliant, too much the child of the savage North ever to be reduced to that dependency. If a man ever took her for mate it must be on equal terms. That she might be won, he hoped; that she would be easily won, he never dreamed; and as he sought to build for himself a niche in her life, carefully and deliberately, he never presumed as many men might have done in similar circumstances. Sometimes as he talked with her he would watch her eyes, hoping to see again that light that he had seen when he had ventured to hint of the place she would have in his memory; but not again did its glow quicken his heart with hope.

With friendliness and comradeship growing from day to day they reached the mouth of the Big Salmon River, and there the girl's prophecy was vindicated;

for looking overside, they saw the cloudy mush-ice flowing into the main current, whilst the Yukon itself on either bank had rims of ice many yards broad. The girl pointed in turn to the mush-ice and to the rims in shore.

"What did I say? All the way down the river it is the same now. The tributaries are bringing down the mush, and soon it will freeze. We shall not reach the Pelly before the river closes."

The cold grew steadily. Twice there was snow which remained, mantling the earth with white, and making the dark pines funereal of aspect. At night they had to cut their way ashore with an axe, and in the morning the outward cut was longer, which consumed much time. And one morning, crawling out of his sleeping-bag, Purnell, looking across the broad river, saw it running white, full of mush-ice, with no open water anywhere. He had never seen anything like it before, and he whistled softly to himself, and then wakened Ranleigh.

"The water's gone," he said. "The river is just running ice."

Ranleigh surveyed the phenomenon, then he nodded. "What is to be done, I wonder?"

"Can't say! But——"

"We must break our way to the current," said Lisette's voice behind them. "The river may run some time yet—a day, perhaps two days, who knows?"

"But the ice will form about the boat!" objected Purnell.

"What matter? We shall still keep moving until all the mush goes solid, and every mile will be a mile nearer Dawson. There is nothing else to be done, unless you make a winter camp here."

Purnell looked round the wintry landscape, the bleak snow-covered hills, the dark woods, and shivered.

"The river for me as long as it will crawl."

Ranleigh shared his views, and after mighty efforts they reached the centre of the flowing ice, and for a time they moved steadily forward. The ice formed around the boat in a solid mass. The mush-ice began to cake, the cakes froze to each other, and yet they moved forward, sluggishly but steadily, very conscious of the increasing cold. Towards afternoon the movement almost ceased, and Ranleigh expressed a fear that there and then the river was going solid.

"No," said the girl, "not yet. The ice has jammed somewhere. Presently we shall move again."

It was as she said, and for an hour they drifted on, then as the course of the current carried them nearer the shore, which there offered an easy landing-place, and was lined with timber, the girl suggested a landing.

"If we go farther, we may be caught by the freeze-up in the middle of the river. Here we can work inshore."

At once Ranleigh and Purnell set to work, poling the ice-encumbered boat through the cakes and the steadily congealing mush-ice towards the bank. It took them almost an hour to reach the rim-ice and a full hour more to get to the bank, and by the time the fire was going night had fallen.

Listening, before he went to sleep, Ranleigh caught the grinding of the floes, telling him that the river still moved, and the sound was in his ears when he went to sleep. But in the morning when he awoke there was a great silence over the land. For a little time he lay still, considering that silence, then he rose and looked towards the river. It was sheathed in ice from bank to bank, and on the ice was a slight powdering of snow. The freeze-up had arrived, and from its source to its many-mouthed entrance to the Behring

the great river had surrendered to the ice-chain that would hold it for nearly half a year.

Whilst he stood there looking on the wintry scene Purnell joined him, and as he looked across the river, gave a laugh.

"Frozen from bank to bank!" he commented.

"Yes, and we're still hundreds of miles from Dawson."

"And high heaven knows how many miles from the Porcupine. But we've just got to make it."

"Yes."

"It will be collar work in the traces going over the ice to Dawson, even after we have cached most of the outfit."

"Yes, and there is Miss Lisette's Indian——"

He broke off at the sound of a step behind them, and looked round. The girl was coming towards them, and after they had greeted her she spoke to them.

"I heard you mention my Indian——"

"Yes, I was wondering what to do——"

"Please do not trouble over him," she interrupted.

"When my other Indian left us at Windy Arm, he had his instructions. I knew that whatever befell I could not reach Dawson by open water, and so I made arrangements for him to return to meet me over the ice. In a few days he will come up the ice with dogs, and with them the distance will be nothing."

"But suppose he passes our camp——"

"I told him to keep to the eastern bank, and he will do it. Nor will he pass any encampment without inquiry, so he will not miss us."

"Dogs!" cried Purnell enviously. "If we had those, Miss Lisette——" He broke off with a laugh. "But what's the use of crying for the moon?"

"But if the moon should come when you cry, Mr. Purnell?" asked the girl smilingly.

"What do you mean, Miss Lisette? Can you whistle dogs out of the wilderness?"

"Not out of this particular wilderness!" She swept her hand in a half-circle. "But out of another wilderness—yes!"

"You mean out of the Porcupine country, Miss Lisette! But that's a long way from——"

"No! No! I mean much nearer at hand. Last night when the river grew quiet I knew that the ice had locked, and that the boat would be no more use till the spring. And in the night I talked with Nanook, who belongs not to the Porcupine, but to the Pelly country. And we are not far from the junction with the Pelly River, where Nanook has many friends with dogs. If you wait till Joe comes, then Nanook will send him with a message, and if you will exchange some of your stores, between the barter and the friendship you may get a team, perhaps two teams."

"We stay," said Ranleigh quickly. "And we shall be deeply indebted to Nanook——"

"No! No! But for you we should possibly not have left Windy Arm yet! Nanook is very grateful. He guesses that even now he delays you, because you will not leave me alone to care for him. And knowing, as he says, how the gold-madness has fallen upon all white men, and how you will desire to hurry forward when you can, he suggests this course. It will save you many weeks in the end; for by this time it is sure that in Dawson dogs will be at a premium, since all the men who have found gold will desire a team."

"We camp here till you give the word, Miss Lisette!"

The girl laughed. "Then that is settled. After breakfast we will run up some sort of flag to catch Joe's eye."

All three of them turned from the river, and that

morning they made a more leisurely breakfast than they had made for weeks, and later Ranleigh and his partner searched the woods behind for game, but found none. As they returned to camp it began to snow, and the storm lasted three whole days, and when it ceased the face of the whole country was changed, everything being deeply hidden under a blanket of snow a yard deep on the level.

Day followed day, and still Joe did not appear. No one passed up or down the river for a week, and except for the little oasis of life that the camp represented, the land seemed utterly desolate and void of moving life.

But on the eighth day as the short daylight faded, looking across the frozen river, Purnell discerned the bright glow of a camp fire. He stared at it curiously for a moment, and then quite suddenly he announced:

"There's a man and a brother across there. He may be wanting me; guess I'll respond."

He laughed as he spoke; and presently he left the camp, and wearing snowshoes, slowly receded into the night.

"I hope he finds his brother," laughed Lisette.

"Who do you imagine it will be?" asked Ranleigh, laughing with her.

"I cannot tell," she said. "Some party of gold-seekers caught in the freeze-up like ourselves, and making their way to Dawson, over the ice, I expect."

She lingered a moment, watching that gleaming patch of light, and then as she turned towards the camp, Ranleigh referred to a matter that had burdened his mind all day.

"Joe's coming with the dogs seems rather delayed, does it not, Miss Lisette?"

"No!" said the girl in answer. "You forget that the hard winter trail has not yet been made."



No one has gone up the river since the freeze-up, and none gone down. Remember, whoever travels first this way or that breaks trail; and trail-breaking is a heavy task. If in two days Joe arrives I shall think he has done very well indeed. And Joe is a very exceptional traveller. You must be patient, Mr. Ranleigh," she added with a little laugh.

"Oh," he answered, laughing with her. "I am in no hurry to quit this camp. I suppose, though, that you will go when Joe arrives with the dogs?"

"What else—since he will have come for me?" asked the girl lightly.

For a moment Roy Ranleigh was tempted to suggest that they should all continue to travel together, but he refrained from voicing the suggestion.

"Well," he answered hesitatingly, "I suppose you are right."

"Necessity will send us our separate ways," she said carelessly enough; then Ranleigh's thought slipped out.

"Why should it," he asked, "since we both go to the Porcupine?"

"Because on the Porcupine we must follow different trails," she answered quietly.

"But is there any necessity for that, Miss Lisette?" he asked eagerly. "We have been comrades of the trail for weeks, Fate threw us together in an odd moment, and contrived to link us together by strange meetings; do you mean to break the comradeship thus begun and maintained?"

His voice was eager, protesting, and as he stood looking at her she caught the expression on his face as it revealed itself in the leaping flames of the fire.

"Oh!" she cried in a voice that had grown suddenly tremulous, "it is not I who will break this fellowship of the trail! It is life itself."

"You think that?" he demanded. "You really think that we can meet in such extraordinary circumstances and then pass on like—what is the phrase?—like ships in the night? You do not see in all this the hand of Fate?"

"The hand of Fate—that is ourselves," said the girl. "We do a thing, or we do not do it, that is all. And if duty calls one to far trails that one follows obediently, if not eagerly, then still it is oneself that makes the election."

"Then of your own will you decree——"

"I follow a secret duty!" she protested, "which is none the less a duty because it is in my power to repudiate it."

"It has to do with your father?" he cried impulsively.

"With my father!" she answered with a quiet gravity, "and it is his secret that I keep, not my own."

"Tell me, Miss Lisette! Let me help you!"

"No!" she said, with a little catch in her voice. "I cannot tell you! And you cannot help me; no one can, since only I can help my father."

Roy Ranleigh felt as if he were up against a stone wall. There was a finality in the girl's tones that made it impossible for him to press the matter further without rudeness. He did not know what to do, what to say, but he was conscious of dismay at the thought that when the dogs arrived she would go out of his life for ever. When, after a little pause he spoke again, there was a protesting note in his tones.

"But if we should meet upon the Porcupine you will let me meet your father?"

"That will depend upon my father's will," answered Lisette quietly. "When I get back to—er—when I reach home I shall tell him of you and of your kind-

ness, and he will decide the matter. That is the most that I can say." She turned from him and looked towards the tent. "I think I must go to Nanook now."

She moved away and, left to himself, Ranleigh began to pace up and down in the hardened snow of the camp. That some mystery shrouded the life of Lisette's father seemed certain; but he could make not the wildest guess as to the nature of it, nor could he decide the course he himself should pursue. At one moment he was tempted to seek out the girl and openly declare his love for her; and at the next it seemed wiser to let things take the course the girl had decided for them, trusting to the future to set things right. He was still pacing to and fro, perplexed and in doubt, when Purnell loomed out of the grey darkness, and without a word walked to the fire, and setting his back to it, looked steadily in the direction of the river.

"What is the matter?" asked Ranleigh quickly.

"I am just testing whether that fire across the river is visible from our fire," answered Purnell quietly. "Fortunately it isn't."

"Fortunately?"

"That's the word. In that camp over there are some acquaintances of ours."

"Indeed! Who——"

"Slackman and that precious scoundrel who presided at the miners' meeting. There are two other men with them of the same kidney."

"Slackman? Phew!"

"Yes! I worked round the camp to find out who was in it before revealing myself; and it was lucky that I did. I heard Slackman's voice, and creeping nearer I got a look at the crew. They were talking, and I gathered that they are hurrying to

Dawson in the endeavour to overtake me. Evidently they mean to have Stefanson's gold—if they can get it."

"It would seem so. But if they move on to-morrow they'll overshoot us, and that will worry them a little. If they've the remotest idea of the location of the dead Swede's strike they'll probably trail out from Dawson to look for it, and for us."

"And if they haven't they'll lay for us in Dawson," said Ranleigh musingly. "It looks as if the Porcupine trail isn't going to lack interest."

"Lack interest!" Purnell laughed as he echoed the words. "It's going to be the liveliest trail north of the Circle, if those scoundrels get our wind. But we know now that they're positively laying for us, and forewarned is forearmed."

"Yes," agreed Ranleigh; "but we shall have to keep a bright look-out, for those fellows won't scruple at shooting if they get us on a lonely trail."

"Oh!" retorted Purnell. "In that matter, I've shed a whole bunch of scruples in the snow out there." He jerked his hand towards the river. "And if trouble promises, I shall myself shoot—on sight. Fellows who tried to hang me, knowing I was innocent, aren't entitled to a warning." He broke off, laughed a trifle grimly, and then quoted softly: "'And there's never a law of God or man's run north of Fifty-three.' The Porcupine crosses the Circle, and the Circle's a long way north of Fifty-three. And once we're up there, if those rogues butt in, it will be the law of the gun with me."

And from the hard light in his eyes, his friend judged that he meant every word.

## CHAPTER IX

## A DECLARATION

**I**N the morning, through his glasses, Purnell watched the men across the river strike camp, and pull out down the trail for Dawson. When they were mere specks upon the snow, he turned to Ranleigh and laughed.

"Hot-foot!" he said. "They're making the snow burn, so sure are they that we are ahead! We're safe from trouble this side of Dawson, anyway. But I wish that Indian would show up with the dogs."

It was three days later when his wish was realized, and Lisette's henchman drove into camp with a long sled and a double team of dogs; and after a meal and a rest had a talk with Nanook, then dividing the team he set out once more and was gone three days, returning with a second Indian and another team of dogs. The new-comer, with Nanook for interpreter, immediately proceeded to bargain, and at last arranged to sell two teams in exchange for certain stores, a rifle with a hundred rounds of ammunition and two hundred dollars.

"They are cheap at the price," said the girl. "Dogs will be selling at a dollar a pound in Dawson, and you are fortunate to get these."

"But we haven't got them yet," commented Purnell.

The girl laughed. "You will. The man is Nanook's brother. He is returning in the morning to bring the teams and the sled you want; and if I may advise you, I should try and engage him to go with you part way to Dawson until you get accustomed to the dogs."

"Guess we shall only be too pleased," laughed

Purnell, "and we shall have you and Joe to help a pair of *cheechakos* who——"

"No!" interrupted the girl. "I shall pull out for Dawson in the morning. It is really urgent that I should." She did not look at Ranleigh when she spoke; but he knew that she was fulfilling her resolve to journey alone to the Porcupine, and that evening, when he was walking with her under the shadow of the great firs, he was moved to speak.

"You are really going in the morning?"

"Yes," she answered simply.

"And you have no regret at leaving us after these weeks on the trail?"

"I did not say that," she replied quickly.

"Then you do regret?"

"One is always sorry to part with friends."

"Friends——" he began, broke off, and then asked abruptly: "Do you remember the farewell message you left for me with Cavannagh when you went back to Skagway?"

"Perfectly," she answered. "'Good luck on the trail, and plenty of gold in the pan.' I shall wish it you with my own lips in the morning."

"Cavannagh gave me the message," continued Ranleigh, "and I was glad to get it. When I left he made it his own by repeating it—with a difference."

"A difference?" she inquired interestedly.

"Yes, or rather with an addition."

"What could he add to it?" questioned the girl with a little laugh. "The luck of the trail and gold in the pan seems to me an almost perfect wish for a gold-seeker."

"Cavannagh is an Irishman; he has eyes, and he is a sentimentalist, therefore he added to the wish, making it perfect."

Again the girl laughed. "And this touch of per-

fection," she asked, "what was it? How did Cavanagh paint the lily?"

"He gave the wish, then with his Irish tongue he added, 'An' a praste to your hand whin ye'll be needing him for the weddin'.'"

Once more the girl's laughter sounded like clear bells in the great stillness of the woods, but there was a little quiver in the sound, then she said: "That was like Cavannagh."

"It was a good wish," insisted Ranleigh. "Cavanagh knew when he gave me that wish that I loved you, that some day I should ask you to marry me——"

"Oh, but I have told you——" began the girl in some distress.

"Yes. You have told me that your duty is with your father; you have not told me why, and it is not for me to judge. But you are going away in the morning, and I want you to know that you take my heart with you. This is a wild land—a land of great spaces, and it may be long before we meet again. For that reason I tell you this now whilst the opportunity is here. I love you, I have loved you from that night when you took me to Dyea——" He broke off, checked his pacing, and laid a hand upon her arm. "Lisette, lift your face; look at me."

"Why?" she whispered, and he felt her arm tremble under his hand.

"Because once I saw a gleam in your eyes; only once—like a flash of summer lightning, or a flicker of the aurora; but I have a hope that—that——" He broke off, waited, then whispered hoarsely: "Lisette? Lisette?"

Slowly her face was lifted. He saw it like a flower in the grey gloom of the Arctic night. Her eyes were like twin pools of night as they met his in level glance.

"It is too dark," she whispered, as he stared down at her; "you cannot——"

"Lisette," he whispered back as her voice broke off quiveringly, "you love me? It was not summer lightning that I saw—it was—it was the undying flame?"

"How can I know? I——"

"Lisette, you do know! Say it! To-morrow you will be gone into the waste. This hour we have, only this. You love me? You love me as a woman loves?"

"Yes."

The answer was in a whisper faint as that of a falling leaf, but he heard it, and gathered her in his arms. They stood so for a little time, then she broke out:

"We must move, walk, or our feet will freeze!"

He laughed at this prosaic reminder, and with his arm about her they moved forward.

"You will have to take me to your father now," he said with laughing exultation.

"Oh no!" she cried in sudden distress.

"But you must," he said, sobered by her evident trouble. "It is the only thing to do——"

"I cannot," she replied quickly. "Not until he gives the word."

"Then if you cannot do that, tell me at least where I can find him and you——"

"No," answered the girl quiveringly, "not even that until I have his permission."

That the girl was much distressed at her own refusal was clear to Ranleigh, and that her resolution was unshakable was equally clear. He did not know what to do. To insist in such circumstances seemed churlish; not to do so seemed folly. In the quandary he was silent for a little time, then again he spoke protestingly:



"But, my dear, we cannot part in this way. I cannot let you go into the wilderness without knowing where I can find you, with but little hope of seeing you again; for that is what your decision amounts to. The country up here is so big, the woods so vast, and the hills and waterways so tortuous that though we spend all our days up here, once separated, we may never meet again. You must see that, my dear, and seeing it——"

"Oh, I know," interrupted the girl. "But even that does not make it possible for me to do what you wish without disloyalty to my——" She broke off without completing the sentence. "Wait!" she said. "Let me think! There may be a way!"

Ranleigh walked on by her side without speaking, wondering what was in her mind, and after a little time the girl spoke.

"There is one thing we can do," she said thoughtfully.

"Yes?" he cried eagerly. "Yes?"

"If through the long months of winter we should not meet—and remember there are always chances that we may—then when the ice goes out we can meet at Dawson."

"When the ice goes out—that will not be for five months!" he cried.

"No," agreed Lisette. "But what of that? We can live for that moment, and the dark months will not seem long."

"They will be like five eternities one on the other!" he almost groaned.

"Scarcely that," she replied cheerfully. "You will be very busy. You will have much to do, you will be weeks on the trail; and if you are like some of the men up here you will be astonished at the swift passing of the days."

"Perhaps," he said dubiously, and added, "Lisette, you are determined to do this thing?"

"There is no other way," she answered.

"And in the spring you will go to Dawson, without fail?"

"On the first open water," she answered emphatically.

"I shall be there to meet you. I shall be there on the last ice. I shall watch the river till you come."

"Then that is settled! And through the months of snow and darkness I shall dream of—of open water."

"Lisette, you dear! . . . But your father, you will tell him?"

"Yes! I think he will be glad. He may even send for you."

"If he does the snow will burn under my heels. But he will not know where to send. I am not sure of the place myself!"

"What matter. He has means of finding out!"

Ranleigh stared at the girl wonderingly. "Means of finding out! What means? Is he a wizard?"

The girl laughed a trifle oddly. "He is even something of that."

He stared at her in a puzzled way. Was the girl jesting, or did she really mean what she said? Perhaps his thought communicated itself to her, for a moment later she spoke again laughingly: "I mean what I say. My father is really a wizard; and if you are anywhere on the Porcupine, I think he will be able to find you."

Ranleigh visioned the course of the river as he remembered it on the map. It covered some hundred miles of country, and the girl's claim seemed almost preposterous. Yet somehow her laughing words carried conviction. She really believed that the man of

mystery, her father, could find him even in that huge tract of country if he desired to do so. Ranleigh, without any real ground, found himself convinced of the same thing, but determined to leave nothing to chance.

"I will tell you as well as I can where I hope to be," he said. "It will make it easier even for a wizard, if you know the locality. Somewhere on the head-waters of the river there is a chain of small lakes——"

"The Nahoni lakes!" interrupted the girl.

"You know them?" he asked.

"I have been there with my father."

"Well, somewhere up the fifth creek after passing the lakes, a creek which winds deeply among the hills, there is a small lake. That is the place for which Purnell and I are making. It will probably take us a couple of months to reach it, and we shall be there for some time. So if your father would like to see me, he has but to send word there——"

"He might make the journey himself," said the girl quickly. "He is a great traveller."

"So much the better—and if he would bring you with him, Lisette——"

Lisette laughed. "You must not ask too much, Roy! The Porcupine trail in winter is not an easy one. It is as bitter as any in the North."

"Well, at any rate he will bring me news of you, Lisette."

"Perhaps! If he comes! But he is a shy man—my father. I think he has seen but seven white men in ten years. He avoids them whenever possible, though once or twice he has helped them when they have been in difficulties."

"He helped Cavannagh!"

"Yes, and there are others, more than are aware

of the fact. But you, perhaps, he will hurry to see, because . . . because he loves me."

"He will be more welcome than the spring," answered Ranleigh fervently.

"Than the spring, Roy?" asked the girl in laughing reproach. "In the spring I go to Dawson——"

"Lisette! My dear!" he cried, and gathered her in his arms again.

So for a moment they stood, then the girl said: "We must go back to camp, or Mr. Purnell will grow alarmed. Also I take the trail at daybreak, and there is much to do."

They walked back between the dark, snow-laden pines, and in the shadow of one which seemed to tower to the stars, just beyond the circle of fire-light, Ranleigh held her in his arms for a moment.

"Oh, my man!" she whispered tremulously. "My man!" Then slipping from him she went straight to the tent.

Through the long hours of darkness Roy Ranleigh lay awake. At one moment he was exultant at the thought that this girl of the Northland loved him, and the next his spirits were dashed as he thought of the coming separation, and as he worried himself by the mystery amid which she moved. Who was this father for whom she had made the laughing claim of wizardry, and who shunned rather than sought the company of white men? Seeking an answer, his mind turned to many possible answers, none of which offered the least satisfaction, and when the cold dawn broke he was still as far as ever from the heart of the mystery.

The sound of bustle in the camp told him that preparations for the girl's departure were being made; and crawling out of his sleeping-bag, he found the Indian Joe busy at the fire. This man, he told him-

self, could solve the mystery if he were to ask him. It needed but a dozen words and a few sticks of tobacco to learn the truth. He was strongly tempted, but he resisted. If Lisette would not tell him, then he would not stoop to learn the truth by underhand means.

And so it fell that an hour and half later he watched Lisette and her Indians pull out on the trail, without having lifted even a corner of that veil of mystery which the girl so rigorously kept drawn. The girl went last, and he accompanied her a little way down the trail. At their parting her eyes glowed with the light that he had striven to see in them in the darkness of the previous night. There was a smile on her face as she stopped for the last good-bye.

"My dear," she whispered. "I give you the good wish. 'Good luck on the trail, and plenty of gold in the pan!'"

"And——" he said, "and——"

She laughed as she caught his meaning, and falling into Cavannagh's brogue, she completed the wish: "'An' a praste to your hand whin ye'll be needing him for the weddin'."

"Amen!" said Ranleigh reverently, and the next moment she was speeding down the trail.

Roy Ranleigh stood to watch her. Only once did she turn to look up the backward trail; and that was when she reached a long spit of land crowned with pines, beyond which the sled had already disappeared. There she turned, waved her hand once, and as Ranleigh waved back swung round the tree-grown spit and was lost to view. For a little time longer he stood there, hoping that the girl would come into view again. But the trail swept in towards the bank, and she did not reappear. After a little while, convinced that for the time he had seen the last of her, he looked round on the snow-covered, forbidding hills and the

heavy sky, and was conscious of a sudden feeling of depression.

"The abomination of desolation!" he muttered; and then, suddenly aware that the chill of the frozen snow was striking through his rubber boots, and knowing that to linger there was to invite disaster, he turned and walked swiftly back to the camp where his friend awaited him.

## CHAPTER X

### ENCOUNTERS IN THE SNOW

**F**IVE weeks later, in the first gusts of a blinding storm, Ranleigh and his partner, accompanied by the Pelly Indian whom they had engaged as driver, staggered into Dawson. The saloons and dance halls were in full swing, but apparently there was no one abroad, and the long street stretching along the front of the frozen river appeared to be utterly deserted. A third of the way up Ranleigh stopped the team, and consulted with the Indian as to the possibility of finding accommodation. But the native had been in Dawson only once before and knew nothing of its resources.

"There's nothing for it but to inquire at one of the saloons," said Purnell. "Wait here and I'll ask——"

"Hallo, boys! You got ther mail there?" cried a voice as its owner lurched out of the snow-wrack.

"No," answered Ranleigh quickly. "But we've just arrived, and are wondering where we can find accommodation for the night. Perhaps you can tell us?"

The man looked at the piled-up sledges, then without taking any apparent notice of Ranleigh's question, he offered comment: "Say, boys, that's a top-number size of outfit you've got there."

"It's pretty fair," laughed Ranleigh.

"An' you got heaps of sugar, I'll take my Bible oath."

"A fair quantity!" said Ranleigh, wondering what the fellow was after.

"Then," said the man quickly, "I'll do a trade with you. Sugar's the one thing I'm busted on; an' dollars won't buy it in Dawson till new supplies come in next spring water, an' accommodation for man an' beast is what you're busted on. Well, here's the trade. You got the sugar and I got the accommodation, to wit, as snug a log-cabin as there is in Dawson; an' being a bachelor with a tooth as sweet as a bear's, I'll trade you cabin-room for one cup of sugar per diem for the lot of you."

Ranleigh turned to consult Purnell, and as he did so the man spoke again: "Say, boys, I ain't concealed no facts, an' I'm giving you a square deal. Sugar can't be bought in Dawson at no figure; but you can get bunk an' board at the hotels, where they're just bandits an' road-agents who'll take the pelt off you whilst you're alive. If you've got the sugar it's a cheap deal, an' the cabin is a fair 'ome from 'ome. Come an' view it."

"We will," said Ranleigh. "Lead on, friend!"

The man bent his head to the storm, and led the way up the long water-front, swung round a building, between others which crowded behind the more pretentious front, then across a frozen bog at the rear of the town, and began to ascend a wooded hill. A few minutes after he halted before a cabin of squared logs, threw open the door, lit the stump-end of a candle, and announced with pride: "This is the palace, gents. Step right in. There's a shed at the back where your driver can stall the dogs."

Purnell spoke to the Indian, who nodded his under-

standing ; then, Ranleigh leading, they accepted the stranger's invitation. Bitter as was the cold outside, the roaring Yukon stove filled the cabin with pleasant heat, and the red glow of it was comforting to men who for many hours had laboured on the trail. Rudely furnished as the place was, it had the air of being a man's home, and with all its rude simplicity, yet proclaimed the fact that its owner had a clean and tidy soul. With a grin wrinkling his bearded and frost-bitten face, the miner, with a gesture of pride, said : "'Ome from 'ome. . . . Is it a deal, gents ? "

" I think it is," said Ranleigh.

" Then shake ! "

They shook hands on the compact ; then the owner of the cabin introduced himself as Jack Dearnly, and set to work to help them to cook a meal. When the Indian piled up their stores against the cabin wall, the miner looked at it in amazement.

" Say, boys, you ain't goin' to open out a store, are you ? "

" No," answered Ranleigh with a laugh.

" Nor yet a feeding-house ? "

" No," laughed Ranleigh again. " Why do you ask ? "

" It's the outfit. It's a royal one ! You boys ain't never goin' to eat all that grub."

" We'll try hard, anyway," laughed Purnell.

" You'll never do it, boys, never in this world." Dearnly grinned cheerfully as he made this assertion, then whilst they ate, he gave them the gossip of Dawson.

" There ain't a claim left for you boys to stake ; all the creeks are took up ; but there's a stampede most every day to a new Bonanza which some guy has discovered and which is mostly blanks. I reckon, however, that sooner or later the real thing will happen



along, an' then you boys, if you've got your wits about you an' can travel, will locate the pay-dirt."

The two friends let him ramble on, giving him no hint of their intention to proceed beyond Dawson, having no desire to make the Porcupine country, whither they were bound, the objective of one of the stampedes of which he spoke. When the meal was over their host suggested an adjournment to one of the saloons to which he had been going when he had stumbled on them in the snow.

"Maybe you're a bit played out now, an' would sooner rest; but when you've been a month in the cabin you'll just yearn for social life, an' down town there's some real high-flyers. It does a man good to see 'em."

Ranleigh looked at Purnell, who laughed. "Reckon I don't mind having a glimpse of Dawson's social life."

"And I'm not too done up!" said Ranleigh, laughing also.

"Right, boys! Then we'll just step down as far as the Tivoli."

He led the way into the snowy night, and down the trail to the town and to Dawson's celebrated place of entertainment. As they entered, the Englishman was amazed by its gorgeousness. For so young a town it really was a surprise, and a testimony to the energy and enterprise of its proprietor. On one side was a modern bar, brass furnishing, bevelled mirrors and all, with stacks of costly liquors, where bar-tenders in jackets of snowy white dispensed the various poisons under fancy names. On the other side was a gambling saloon with faro lay-outs, wheels of fortune, and roulette tables, and directly in front were swing-doors leading to the dance hall. Dearnly led the way first to the bar, then to the swing-doors

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which opened on a hall gorgeously decorated, along each side of which were perched small private boxes supported by gilded pillars, each box hung with silken curtains. At the far end of the hall was a well-lighted stage, where a woman gaily bedizened was singing a sentimental song, and when she came to the chorus she waved a hand.

"Now, boys!"

The boys, for the most part bearded men, responded lustily, and a very roar of sound, with the woman's high soprano like the white crest of the wave, filled the hall.

The same crescendo of sound followed each verse; and as he listened and looked on the faces about him, rapt and earnest, Ranleigh was amazed. He had seen audiences in England hanging on the lips of some favourite of the halls, and had heard both stalls and gallery chanting some chanson of the day; but never with such earnestness and gusto as these Jasonites of the North displayed. As he looked at the bearded faces he wondered at their enthusiasm, for as a singer the artiste was far from the front rank of her profession; and it crossed his mind that the contrast between the bleak darkness outside, and this warm and gilded interior, with the liquors that many of them had obviously consumed, had much to do with their appreciation of the singer. But the appreciation was there, and it expressed itself in solid form; for when the song ended, where fools in the Southland threw flowers, these men of the high North threw nuggets. At least a dozen reach the stage, and the woman gathered them up with a business-like air, waved a bare arm, flashed a dazzling smile and was gone—in a very tumult of rapturous applause.

The next performer was a dancer, "a real high kicker," as Dearnly described her, whose performance

was even more enthusiastically received. She was dressed as a Bacchante, with vine leaves in her hair, and her dancing was most alluring. In a slow gliding step she came on the stage, full of grace and witchery. She was human, yet there was something panther-like in her tread and the litheness of the panther in her half-clad form; whilst her eyes, as they roamed over that audience of rough miners, were like those of that animal looking for its prey, as perhaps they were, for most of her kind that the Northland knew were utterly predatory in their instincts. Twice she crossed the stage to the tune of the tinkle of tiny bells attached to her ankles, then she began to dance. There was no question as to the quality of her dancing; it would have won applause from a blasé audience in any capital of the world; and in this white and gilded hall, which represented to exiled men the amenities of life that they had left behind them in the Southland, it moved men to the topmost pitch of excitement.

At first she moved slowly, her eyes fixed on a corner of the stage, and the murmuring bells kept tune with the subdued music to which she danced, then her arms were slowly extended towards some unseen Dionysus, whilst a smile of uttermost witchery came on the painted lips. Slowly she circled towards the audience, her arms still held out in invitation, her eyes full of golden light, her young face full of allure-ment. The audience watched her rapt and still. Not a man moved; some scarcely seemed to breathe, but stared at her with fixed eyes, like men entranced. Then quite suddenly the dancer gave a mad shriek, the bells and the music clashed as she leaped, and she went off in the wildest kind of whirl. Sometimes cries broke from her, synchronizing with the crash of the orchestra and the clash of her bells. A wild abandon characterized her. Her coppery hair broke loose from

the fillet that bound it and streamed like a flame about her ; ecstasy that mounted almost to madness seemed to dictate her movements.

The spectators began to lose control of themselves. Men cried out unmeaningly in response to her own wild cries ; and Ranleigh, watching the wave of excitement mount, wondered what would happen. A man rose to his feet and yelled something, then with a crash of music and a clash of bells the dance stopped quite suddenly, and quivering and breathless, radiating youth and femininity and abandon, a true Bacchante of this modern world, the artiste stood, breast heaving, arms stretched forward appealingly, eyes alight with witchery, her face a very embodiment of alluring invitation. So for a moment she stood ; then the applause broke out, rapturous, tumultuous. Men stood and shouted compliments, or flung them in more solid form, and as the din slackened a little, Ranleigh became aware of a tall man who was well to the front, a man with a flaming head and beard, who dexterously flicked something on to the stage. The Englishman thought it was a nugget ; but apparently it was only a note crumpled into a ball, for the girl retrieved it, smoothed it out, and in sight of the audience deliberately read it. Then a flashing smile came on her face ; as if in triumph she waved her bare arm as she held the note, and, pirouetting round the stage, glided behind the wings.

The noisy applause broke out afresh ; but now laughter mingled with it, and Ranleigh suddenly realized that it was addressed to the man with the flaming head and beard, who was moving down the hall with a bemused look upon his face. Jack Dearnly began to join in the applause and the laughter.

"What is the joke ?" asked Purnell as the man drew nearer.

"Sure it's a creamy one! Everybody guesses that Red Rufe is going out to take the girl before a priest."

"To marry her?"

"What else? She's a wise little girl and none of your regular wine-winners! She's been playing Rufe for a month, and he's a millionaire with a claim on Bonanza that has fortunes for three men left in it. Everybody knows that he's struck on her; but that she wants the tie there's no undoing, an' in consequence they haven't been on no sort of terms for a week. Now it's clear that Rufe has tossed the sponge, and that Dawson 'll be dancing at the wedding of a king in no time at all! Good thing for Rufe. She'll look after his poke, an', as like as not, when he goes out make him a Senator at Washington. He——"

The red-bearded one, flushed of face, drew level with them. The bemused look was still in his blue eyes, but his humorous mouth stretched in a grin, as Dearnly smote him on the shoulder.

"Bravo, Rufe!"

The curtain fell as the Klondike King passed through the gilded swing-doors; men began to clear the hall for dancing, and Dearnly gripped the arms of the partners.

"This way, boys! You don't want to dance with those Gerties at two dollars a reel. Let's have a high-ball and then take a look at the lay-out."

He led them to the crowded bar, and from there to the gaming-room, where over green tables and whirling balls presided men with shaded eyes dealing with the nonchalance of long practice. The room was almost uncomfortably crowded. Men of all ages and conditions were challenging fortune; some of the roughest-looking were making the highest stakes, men with the mud of their claims thick upon them, who for greed or for excitement "went the limit" with their hard-won gold.

As they entered an acquaintance greeted Dearnly, and he stopped to talk with him. Purnell and Ranleigh halted a little distance away and looked round the room. As they were standing there, a man, apparently deep in liquor, cannoned against them, staggered, and was shouldered back by a passer-by. The drunkard gripped Purnell with clumsy hands to save himself from falling, and for a moment grinned foolishly in his face. Purnell stretched a hand to steady the fellow, and as he did so made the discovery that the man's eyes were as steady and unclouded by alcohol as his own, and that they were searching his face minutely. Scarcely had he realized this, when the man released his hold, laughed drunkenly, and lurched away. A thought struck the American.

"Follow that fellow, Roy! Watch him. See where he goes and whom he speaks to. I'll wait here."

Without understanding, Ranleigh followed the drunkard on his devious way, and was a little surprised when, having pushed by the crowd that thronged one of the huge wheels of fortune, the man straightened himself, jerked a look back over his shoulder, and then made as straight a line as he could for the door. Following him cautiously, he saw the man cross to the bar, near which two men were standing with their backs to the door of the gaming-room. Walking quickly in the direction of the dancing-saloon, Ranleigh paused with his hand on the swing-door and looked back. The two men had turned and were engaged in earnest conversation with the man who had pretended to be drunk. One of them was a stranger, but the other he recognized instantly. It was Slackman.

As he made that discovery Roy Ranleigh understood why his partner had asked him to follow the man who had pretended to be drunk; and divined

that the shell-game rogue was still on the trail of Stefanson's gold. Pulling his cap well over his eyes, and dropping the ear-flaps to conceal his face, without delay he returned to the gaming-room. Dearnly was still talking to his friend, and Purnell was alone.

"Well?" he asked.

"Slackman's out there!"

"I thought so! Must have seen us come in here and sent a confederate to make sure—somebody who saw me at Sheep Camp, I suppose. The sooner we are out of this the better."

"I think so. It will be as well to give them no time to shape plans."

"They'll follow us!"

"We shall be able to lose them in the snow. Or—wait. I have an idea! We'll give Dearnly a hint that there's likely to be trouble with toughs. He's a good sort and he will help. I'll go first. Those fellows are sure to follow and you and Dearnly can shadow them, and can butt in when the scrap starts. Unless there are others of their crowd outside, we shall be evenly matched, and the advantage of surprise will be with us."

At that moment Dearnly joined them, and without giving him an inkling of the reason why Slackman should cause trouble, Purnell explained the position at the moment.

Dearnly grinned cheerfully.

"I'm in, boys. When do we start?"

"Now!" said Purnell, moving towards the swing-door. "I shall go slow till I reach the street and for the first dozen yards after. That will give you time to get into position."

Ranleigh and the miner waited until he had passed out of the room, gave him half a minute, and then followed. Purnell had almost reached the door lead-

ing to the street, and five yards behind him were the three men.

"They're sure trailing him," said Dearnly, as Purnell and his shadowers passed out into the night.

"Yes!" answered Ranleigh, leading the way outside. The snowstorm had become a blizzard, the wind driving the icy particles in almost horizontal lines that cut the face like whipcord, and forced them to bend their heads to the storm. They could not see a yard before them, and the men whom they were following were already swallowed in the smother. It was an ideal night for any deed of violence requiring secrecy and darkness, for the storm and the icy rain set solitude about each pedestrian; and the wind shrieking up the street would drown a man's cries. As he plunged into the smother Ranleigh was assailed by a sudden fear for his friend.

"Quick!" he shouted to Dearnly.

They staggered forward as best they could. For three minutes they saw no one, and Ranleigh was beginning to be afraid that they had given Purnell's pursuers too great a start, when, as they passed a lighted saloon, he suddenly glimpsed them like shadows in the snow-mirk. Dearnly gripped his arm and pointed, and they pressed the pace as well as they could against the wind. Again they saw the toughs outlined against the lights streaming from some place of entertainment, then they struck a long dark patch of the street made up of offices and stores closed for the night. Scarcely had they slipped into it when Ranleigh heard his friend shout. Owing to the din of the iron wind the cry had a far-away sound; but the Englishman knew that Purnell must be very close, and gasping and half-choked by the whirling snow, he plunged forward.

It was too dark to see clearly, but both Ranleigh



and the miner had an indistinct vision of a snow-covered figure outlined against a dark frame-building with three other figures dancing grotesquely in front.

"The scrap's started!" cried Dearnly in the Englishman's ear, and flung himself joyously into the fray. For his part Ranleigh selected the tallest of the three men, which was Slackman, and as the latter struck savagely at the figure against the building, he smote him a terrific blow behind the ear with his mittened fist. Slackman was thrown straight into Purnell's arms, as promptly flung back again, and then dropped into the snow as if he had been pole-axed.

Dearnly had already knocked his man into the snow, and the third man, seeing himself outnumbered, ran away.

"In the nick of time," cried Purnell pantingly. "Those fellows wasted no breath in talk." He stooped and peered at the prostrate toughs, but could not make out their features. "I wonder who——"

"One of them is Slackman," said Ranleigh. "He will lie there for a little time, I fancy."

"Then he'll freeze," said Dearnly cheerfully. He stooped and turned over the man whom he had knocked down. The fellow revived at that moment and sat up in the snow. Dearnly pushed him over again with his foot.

"Come on, you boys. That one will look after his partner."

Once more they bent their heads to the snow, and had almost reached the point where they turned for the trail across the swamp when they collided with a party of five travelling in the opposite direction. The collision was a severe one, and one of the five sprawled into the snow, whilst Ranleigh himself staggered at the impact. There were ladies in the party, and as the fallen man picked himself up swear-

ing, Ranleigh caught a burst of silvery laughter which made him swing round sharply, and peer through the blinding snow at the woman from whom it came. The hood of the woman's fur parka hid her face, and the snow half-blinded him so that he was unable to see her features ; but as the party went laughingly on its way, he stared after it, with eyes that strove to pierce the darkness.

When they arrived at the cabin there was a very thoughtful look upon his face. Purnell imagined that his partner was troubled by the encounter with Slackman, and expressed his opinion on the matter.

"Those fellows have been on the look-out for us. They knew that sooner or later anyone on the gold-trail was bound to show up in Dawson."

"Yes," agreed Ranleigh.

"They'll search for us now they know we are here, and if they find us——"

"Yes !"

"The sooner we pull out on the trail the better."

"But you can't pull out in this, boys. Your dogs wouldn't go a hundred yards. I don't know what the game is, and I ain't inquiring, but you just can't hit the trail till this blizzard blows itself out."

"How long will that be ?" asked Purnell.

"Three days as like as not. But there's no need for worry. Those guys are not likely to drag their nets whilst the storm's on ; because they'll know you're anchored here an' can't quit till the weather quietens. So just make yourselves cosy, an' don't fret."

"Oh, those fellows won't cause us to lose sleep," said Purnell laughingly. "Will they, Roy ?"

"No," answered Ranleigh.

All the same, that night Roy Ranleigh did lose sleep ; but not because of Slackman. As he stared

through the semi-darkness towards the glowing stove there was in his eyes an incredulous look, whilst his forehead was creased in a frown.

"It can't be," he whispered to himself once, when the heavy breathing of his companions proclaimed they were asleep. "It just can't be."

Then again his memory recalled that burst of silvery laughter out in the snowy street, and a look of doubt came on his face.

"But if it is?" he whispered, and with that question perplexing him he stared long at the glowing stove.

## CHAPTER XI

### TWO HANDFULS OF GOLD

THE storm blew itself out in two days, but was followed by three days of such bitter cold that to take the trail was impossible, and the partners spent most of the time in the cabin, resting and acquiring a reserve of strength for the hard trail ahead of them. But on the third day Roy Ranleigh, sick of the confinement, and made restless by a thought of which his companion knew nothing, went down into the town, and when he reached the river-front walked the whole length of it, carefully scanning the names over the stores and offices. He did not find what he wanted, and turning into a saloon, called for refreshment. The hour being a slack one, he entered into conversation with the barman.

"Hasn't van Corlow got an office somewhere in the street?"

"Yep. A hundred yards up. Smallest frame-building in the street, but a dream inside, or so they tell me. Gold-plated furnish's an' all that, y' know. He's a house up towards the barracks too; nattiest

place in Dawson. He has women-folk stayin' jest now—fair peaches. An' there's a bunch of Fifth Avenue dudes——"

"Is that so?" asked Ranleigh as the man broke off without finishing his sentence.

"That is so!" answered the bar-tender, and a second later turned to serve a noisy handful of miners who had just entered.

Ranleigh left the saloon and walked slowly along the street, almost without thought turning his steps in the direction of Cornelius van Corlow's office. As he reached it he stared at it curiously, and so engrossed was he that he did not observe a dog team in charge of a half-breed stop a few yards up the street; nor did he see a lady in magnificent furs descend from the sled and walk towards a store. But it so happened that his path crossed hers at right angles, and lost in thought he reached the point of intersection at precisely the same moment as the lady. He also blundered into her, and then before he had time to look at her face he began to apologize. "I am sorry——"

A little burst of laughter of the silvery quality that he had heard in the street five nights before broke on his words, and as he looked up in amazement the lady spoke:

"My dear Roy, pray don't apologize. Believe me, I am very glad——"

"It was you the other night," he cried, "after all!"

The lady looked at him in surprise. "The other night? I do not understand," she said.

"It was on the night that the blizzard began," he explained. "I was going down the street with friends when we collided with a party moving in the other direction and——"

"You were one of those three men?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes, and I heard you laugh, but I could not believe my ears."

"I dare say you were surprised," she said. "When you left New York, I began to wonder if I had done right in sending you up here; and as my father was coming up, I persuaded him to make up a little party and bring us along. There is Marie Voorst, whom you will remember, and two of the Craddock girls, with their brothers and young Marriott."

"Quite a merry party," he commented dryly. "But how did you get in? Not by the Skagway trail?"

"No," and again the silvery laugh broke out. "We went to St. Michael's by steamer, and came up-river in a launch towing a scow. We got to Dawson just before the river froze, though it was a race through the mush-ice. Quite simple, you see!" She laughed again, then in a confidential tone added: "I hoped I should meet you soon. And now you must come along and see my father, and consider yourself engaged for dinner to-night."

To Roy Ranleigh it was clear that Edith van Corlow had made up her mind in his favour; and as he looked at her soft beauty framed in priceless sea-otter furs, he found himself wondering what had become of the coronet for which, as he was sure, she had been angling when she had sent him into the North. Clearly her cast had failed, and she had come to Dawson to get the fish of which she was sure.

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "I have an engagement to-night."

There was a little imperious flush in Edith van Corlow's blue eyes. "Nonsense," she said. "What engagement that matters can you have in a hole like this? You must break it, of course."

"That is quite impossible," he answered coolly. "And to-morrow I pull out on the northward trail."

"You are leaving Dawson?" she said, a little touch of dismay in her tones.

"Yes; I am going after that gold you told me to bring you as an earnest of my capacity," he answered with a wintry laugh.

"It was a mistake, Roy," said Edith van Corlow quickly. "What does the gold matter? I——"

"It matters a great deal to me," he interrupted. "A double handful of nuggets of my own finding, you said, and then you would consider my—er—petition. Well, I've just got to get those nuggets to save my self-respect, you know."

"You silly boy!"

"Yes, I dare say you are right. But you shall have the gold by special courier——"

"By special courier?" she asked, struck by something in his tones rather than by the words. "Ah! Does that mean that you will not come yourself?"

He nodded. "Yes! After all, I'm not a dog to be whistled for by any woman, however rich."

Edith van Corlow's face flamed suddenly, and an angry light came in her eyes. Then she laughed. "My dear Roy, don't be a baby! I am glad you feel that you must get that gold——"

"Two handfuls of nuggets of my own finding," he broke in.

"They'll choke you if you're not careful, Roy," she answered in a gay voice, though her eyes watched his face closely. "But I shall be glad to have them—if you bring them yourself."

"No!" he said shortly. "I'm through with the lap-dog business and—er—everything else."

"You are through with—with——"

"Yes!" he answered in reply to her unfinished question, and it was plain that he meant it.

The angry light came back in Miss Van Corlow's eyes and the hot blood flushed her face crimson. For a moment she looked as if she were going to rail at him in the open street, then suddenly she gave a hard laugh.

"I never saw a man develop self-respect so fast," she said with a delicate sneer. "I hope that it will not wilt as fast as it has grown——" She broke off, then quite coolly she said: "Oh, but you shall pay for this, Roy Ranleigh, you shall pay——"

"Two whole handfuls of gold," he said quietly. "I will keep that word if I die in doing so."

"If you die——" Edith van Corlow's voice broke. For one moment she lost her coolness, and when she spoke again her voice quivered with sudden passion. "In this country men do that sometimes—or they crawl out broken men, content to feed at other men's tables, as you would have been if I had not sent you up here——"

"Out of the way!" he finished for her. "But I am very glad you sent me. You did better for me than you knew, far better. I shall be always grateful to you for that! Believe me, I mean it."

She had her passion in leash again now, and as he spoke with evident sincerity, her hard blue eyes narrowed slightly, and a frown contracted her forehead. She wondered what was behind the words, but not having the key to his thoughts could not even guess. That there was something she was sure, and she was still puzzling over its nature when he spoke again:

"If you will excuse me, Miss van Corlow, I think I must go! As I told you, I am hitting the trail to-morrow, and I don't want to start with frosted toes."

"Oh!" she said in a tone that for all its calmness was at white heat. "You may go. But some day you will come to me——"

"With two handfuls of gold nuggets, yes! Or I shall send them to you! One or the other, surely. Good afternoon, Miss van Corlow."

He saluted and passed on his way up the street. She watched him, and not once did he look round; then, forgetting her purpose of entering the store, she strode down the street towards her father's office. As she entered it she burned with humiliation and with hatred of the man who she had thought was at her beck and call, but who had proved that he was not.

Cornelius van Corlow was seated in his inner office, busy with some plans when she entered; but as he caught sight of her he pushed his chair from the table, a question on his lips.

"Pop," she said, "if I asked you to break a man, what would you do?"

"Grind him to dust!" he answered cheerfully. "Name, please?"

"Sir Roy Ranleigh!"

Van Corlow looked at his daughter and whistled. "I thought——" he began.

"Never mind that! I want him broken as small as—as—little peas. I don't want him to get an ounce of gold——"

"Is he in this burg?"

"I've just seen him——"

"Um!" van Corlow interjected, beginning to understand things.

"He's pulling out in the morning."

"On the top of this snow?" asked the mining magnate quickly. "That looks as if he had some definite objective. I wonder if he has located pay-dust."



"I don't know! I don't care! I want him to go through the mill; to be ground so fine that he'll be like the snow-dust that kisses my feet."

Van Corlow laughed suddenly. "What's Ranleigh been doing?"

"That is my affair and his, but I want him to pay for it."

"And he's not to get an ounce of dust in his poke?"

"Not a pennyweight. He's sworn to send me two handfuls of gold; and if he ever does, I shall be humiliated for life."

"We can't have that!" said van Corlow cheerfully. "I'm glad it's a matter of gold. We're rather experts in this office! . . . You say he pulls out in the morning? Where's he staying . . . do you know?"

She shook her head. "No!"

"No matter," said the magnate. "I'll have the trails watched. It will be easy enough to spot him. You may consider it done, and if he's after a pay-claim I won't leave him an ounce of dirt." He laughed sharply. "It's no use having a pull in the claim-recorder's office if one can't use it once in a while. Don't fume, Edith; you shall have the bart's head on a charger if you wish."

"I want him humiliated!" she answered passionately. "To the very dust."

"He shall roll in it, girlie."

"Soon?"

"As soon as the plan can be shaped!"

"I shall wait with—impatience!"

"Don't worry, Ede!" said the magnate, as his daughter turned towards the door. "There'll be no time wasted."

\* \* \* \*

Unconscious of the plot being formulated against

him, Roy Ranleigh continued on his way to Dearnly's cabin. As he thought of his recent interview, he felt better than he had felt for months when Edith van Corlow had been in his mind. At least, he had proved to her that he was not a dog to be whistled for, and the string by which she supposed herself to hold him he had left in her hand.

"And I'll send her that gold," he muttered to himself as he crossed the frozen swamp; "I'll have it made into bracelets. That will be an original present—bracelets of raw gold!"

He laughed to himself as he breasted the rise beyond the swamp, and when he arrived at Dearnly's cabin he was in happy mood. Purnell noticed it, and asked the reason for it.

"I have just met an old friend," he said, "and made a new enemy."

"Good Lor', another?"

"This one is a woman," he said cheerfully.

"Worse and worse," laughed Purnell. "You can handle—man handle a man, but a woman——" He made a gesture of mock despair. "What with Slackman going through the town hunting for us——"

"Is that so?"

"Dearnly's seen him. He and his crowd mean to get us before we quit Dawson."

"Can't we cheat them by leaving to-day?"

"How?"

"It will be dark in two hours. Suppose we persuade Dearnly and the Indian to take the teams out, and make a camp somewhere down the river, then we can slip out in the dark and overtake them. No one in Slackman's bunch knows the Indian or has any idea that Dearnly is associated with us."

"It might be done," said Purnell slowly. "If they went down the trail five miles or so, and we

camped there for the night, we could get away early in the morning, and leave those rascals watching at the outlets of the town. Here comes Dearnly. Suppose we talk it over with him."

They consulted with the miner. "Could be done," he said. "Thermometer's up six degrees. That may mean snow, or just that the cold snap is easing-off."

"Well, will you do it, Dearnly? You've a sweet tooth——"

"Don't I know it? " said the miner with a grimace.

"There's sugar for a good boy," laughed Ranleigh.

"Then here's the imp! I've got a claim on a down-river creek, with four fellows working there. Nobody 'll think I'm stampeding, and there won't be a procession out of Dawson after me. We'll send the Indian on first, and a bit after I'll follow. Anybody seeing me then will just think I'm toting provisions up to the creek. You two can step along after dark, an' I reckon you'll leave your friends guessing."

"Then we'll get ready for you and the Indian to start," said Ranleigh.

Three-quarters of an hour later the Indian ran the first sled down to the river, and Dearnly, watching, saw that no one followed him. Half an hour later he himself took the down-river trail with the second sled, explaining to a friend who chaffed him on his load that he was just running some "store-truck" up to his claim on the creek. As he passed the last building in the town, two men walking to and fro on the trail looked at him sharply; but they did not speak, and as he went on, looking back over his shoulder he saw that they had resumed their pacing. They might be watching the trail, but if so they clearly did not suspect him, and he went on with a light heart.

It was quite dark when Ranleigh and his partner followed, slipping unobtrusively to the river-front and taking the trail up-river. After going a little way however, they left the trail, and began to cross the river to the farther side. When assured that they were not followed, they reversed their course and went down-river, rejoining the trail only when they were half a mile beyond the town front. Then they moved forward quickly, and just as the moon began to light the trail with its cold radiance they sighted a camp-fire glowing on the left bank.

"Dearnly," said Purnell laconically. "No one else would camp within two hours' march of Dawson."

They moved towards the fire confidently, to find the tent pitched, and the miner smoking placidly in front of the fire, whilst the Indian was busy with preparations for the evening meal.

"Get clear away?" asked Dearnly in laconic greeting.

"Yes!"

"See anyone on the trail?"

"No! Did you?"

"There were two guys hanging about at the tail of the town who might be on the look-out; but they didn't follow, an' I reckon you boys will get clear away if you'll pull out early in the morning."

"We'll do that!" said Purnell with a laugh.

And it wanted still two hours to daylight the following morning when they broke camp to take the trail back to the Porcupine.

"Good luck, boys!" said Dearnly as their teams stood on the trail, waiting for the word to start. "Remember if you're in Dawson the 'ome from 'ome is on the latch-string for you."

"We won't forget," said Ranleigh as he wrung the other's hand.

"Nope! Don't!"

Then the whips cracked. "Moosh! Moosh!" rang the marching order through the frozen stillness, and a moment later the teams were heading North on the trail of a dead man's gold.

## CHAPTER XII

### A SILENT LAND

IT was a whole month later and the day was far spent, the dogs were tired and listless, and the men themselves utterly weary, when breaking clear of the snow-covered woods, they came most unexpectedly to the shore of a small lake. The snow lay deep upon its frozen surface, and upon the ragged pines which fringed it and gave it an air of deepest melancholy. High hills, mere shadows in the falling dusk, rimmed it on the farther side, and the silence of the outer places lay heavy on its frozen breadth, and on the woods and hills—a silence that depressed and set a weight upon the spirit—but as the place broke upon their sight, Purnell gave an exultant shout.

"Nahoni! We've hit it!"

The shout seemed like a sacrilege in the vast stillness that brooded over the land, and reverberating from rock to rock filled the place with strange echoes that were like ghostly voices. Ranleigh shivered as he looked on the frozen desolation; and glancing round he noticed that the usually impassive face of the Indian had a disturbed look as if he found the place disquieting. Even Purnell, after the first shout of exultation at having achieved a difficult and seldom-tried traverse successfully, experienced a sudden sense of oppression.

"God!" he whispered. "The place might be the graveyard of the primeval world."

That indeed was a not inapt description. In spring the waterfowl nested in its reeds; in summer the moose-flies and mosquitos haunted it in stinging clouds; in autumn the bears feasted on the berries which ripened on the bushes; and sometimes in winter the wolves hunted the moose across its frozen surface, but seldom was its silence broken by the voice of man. In the open season a few wandering Indians might pitch their moose-hide tepees there; twice or thrice in the course of years, the woods might echo to the crash of some white hunter's rifle; but save for those wanderers the land was desolate, its awful winter stillness unbroken except by the cry of the wolf-pack, the bark of the fox, or the roaring storms thrashing their way down from the Arctic.

As they looked upon the scene for the first time there was no breath of wind in the funereal pines, no eddy of snow across the lake's flat surface, no bark of fox or howl of wolf, no sound at all save the snuffling of their own dogs, and the creak of the harness as they moved uneasily, and its utter stillness accentuated the sense of desolation that it awakened in the mind.

"Yes," said Ranleigh, in answer to his companion's whisper, "this is the White Silence."

"More still than the grave. There at any rate the worms crawl, but here——"

"Let's get a fire going," interrupted the Englishman—"a big one! It will brighten up things. If we stop here whispering we shall all get jumpy nerves."

They set to work, pitched camp, lit the fire, and fed the dogs; then as the darkness descended upon the face of this still land, they seated themselves for the evening meal.

"Something wrong with the Indian," whispered Purnell to the baronet. "He doesn't like this place. Look at him."

"And the dogs aren't any fonder of it than he is. Did you ever see them hug the camp so close before?"

"No!" said Purnell, "and they say that dogs can see things that——"

"Don't, Purnell! It's all rot, of course; but this place gives me the creeps without wild suggestions of that sort!"

"It certainly is a place for goose-flesh. When I listen to the silence I feel my hair lifting, and—— Look at Canim. He hears or he is listening for something."

Ranleigh glanced swiftly at the Indian. His usually impassive face wore an oddly anxious air of expectancy, as if he were waiting for something to appear, and the neglected moose-meat on the tin-plate was freezing as he sat there, with an absorbed look in his eyes. The baronet spoke to him, and the Indian, relaxing his strange attitude of attention, thawed his meat before the fire, and finished his meal. But by the time the pipes were lit he had resumed his listening attitude, and the look of absorbed attention was on his frost-scarred face once more. Then quite suddenly he rose to his feet, skirted the fire, and sat himself down by the two white men, without offering a single word of explanation. To Ranleigh the action seemed full of weird significance, and sent a sudden chill to his heart. The Indian's eyes were towards the lake, which in its white mantle showed vague and ghost-like under the stars; and the baronet himself looked in that direction without seeing anything, except the dim grey waste of snow.

Then with the unexpectedness that is one of its characteristics the aurora began to flame. Streams of pale-green fire shot out of the northern heavens, curling or waving like so many broad ribbons in the wind, and fraying out in all the colours of the spec-

trum. They grew in number, leaping from a crown that glowed so brightly that Ranleigh could distinctly see the shadow cast by a spruce upon the white snow. Brighter grew the light, the crown from which the streamers shot began to revolve, and as it did so the baronet listened intently for that faint crackling sound which is said to accompany the great Arctic pyrotechnics. The sound he heard was vastly different; a sudden startled, half-frightened grunt from Canim.

"Ugh!"

In the same second the Indian leaped to his feet, and his mittened hand shot out in the direction of the lake, as if to point out something. Both Ranleigh and his partner turned instantly in the direction indicated. At that moment the aurora dimmed a little; but in the second that remained of its fullest brightness half-way across the snow-covered lake-ice, Ranleigh thought he saw a dog-team moving. He was not sure; he knew what tricks the imagination can play when stimulated by any eerie or unusual situation, and he kept his eyes fixed on the spot where he had visualized the team, in the hope that the dying aurora might crackle up again at least sufficiently long to reveal whether that racing team had objective reality or not. But the opportunity was not given. The magnetic light continued to fade, and with its fading the frozen lake was merged into the darkness, making it quite impossible to discern any object upon its surface. Ranleigh turned quickly to his partner.

"Did you see, Purnell?"

"Yes! There was a team!"

"Who can it be—up here?"

"Search me, I don't——"

"Evil spirit!"

The words came from the Indian in a hoarse, shaking voice; and as he stood there it was clear that he was



badly frightened. But the white men knew the danger of allowing imaginary terrors to shake the resolution, and Purnell broke out sharply :

"Rot, Canim. Sit down and don't be a fool. Do evil spirits have dogs?"

The Indian collapsed by the fire, his eyes staring across it to the darkness beyond, and then Ranleigh spoke again :

"The team was coming this way!"

"Yes! Maybe we've been followed after all," answered the American. "Anyway, up here we can fight the business out. There's no law to trouble one, and if it comes to a scrap I'm in. Those cads deserve it."

"Whoever it is must have seen the fire. From out there it must show up like a beacon."

"And if it should happen to be any of the gang from Sheep Camp we present a beautiful mark for shooting at. Better get in the shadow of the trees, I think."

They crept to the shelter of the spruce, and there they discussed in whispers the possibility of their trail having been followed.

"Almost impossible," said the baronet. "With the wind that we have encountered, our footprints in the snow, the very trail of the sleds and dogs must have long ago been covered over. Besides, whoever it is, if he is after us he came in the wrong direction. We have only just reached the lake and that team was coming down it; which, if it had been behind us it could not possibly have done. It must be some one else—an Indian, perhaps."

"That's horse-sense at any rate," said the American. "I believe we're freezing our noses for nothing, after all. I think I shall go back to the fire."

"No," said Ranleigh, "wait a little time longer."

It is as well to make sure. The Indians in this part of the world may be hostile, and there's no need to court disaster."

They waited for perhaps half an hour, moving up and down in the shadow of the trees to keep themselves from freezing, and at the end of that time the mysterious aurora glowed again, lighting up the lake and the hills beyond with fantastic opalescent streamers. The eyes of all three searched the lake eagerly. There was not so much as a shadow on its white expanse.

"Gone!" said Purnell joyfully. "The fire for me."

They returned to the fire, and the two white men discussed the occurrence in whispers, whilst the Indian still stared across the fire to the snow-covered world beyond, a morose look on his face. They were all tired, but as the desirability of keeping a watch on the camp suggested itself they divided the night into three spells, the Indian taking the first spell and the other two in turn, Ranleigh himself taking the middle watch.

The night passed quietly enough, and in the morning when the baronet was awakened by the sound of preparation for breakfast he thrust his head out of the sleeping-bag to find he and the Indian were alone in the camp. Instantly he grew alert.

"Where is Mr. Purnell?"

The Indian pointed with his mittened hand towards the lake, and looking in that direction Ranleigh saw the solitary figure of his friend moving towards the tail of the lake, and gradually veering in shore. Guessing that Purnell was following the trail of the mysterious team which the aurora had so unexpectedly revealed, he waited with growing impatience for his return. Three-quarters of an hour elapsed before Purnell broke from the woods behind the camp and

advanced into the open. Ranleigh stared at him in surprise.

"I expected you'd come up from the lake."

"So did I!" retorted Purnell with a little laugh. "I should have done if the trail which I was following had kept straight on, but it didn't. It turned inshore and worked round till it was just at the back of the camp there."

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure! I never took my eyes off it, from start to finish. In the wood back there the fellow anchored his team by turning the sled over on its side; then he took off his snowshoes, and crept within a very few yards of the camp."

"What?" cried Ranleigh. "You're drawing the picture with high colours."

"I'm giving you the facts. If you go back there in the wood you can prove them easily enough. The fellow's trail is there in the snow, and from the look of things he must have been in close proximity to us for a considerable time."

Ranleigh whistled. "Who can it have been, and what did he want?"

"Don't know and can't guess, except that he wanted to take a good look at us."

A thought struck the baronet. "He didn't camp back there in the woods, did he?"

"I followed his trail from the point where he anchored his sled. It runs along a small barren at the back of the trees and roughly parallel with the lake. The fellow, whoever he was, must have gone back the way he came, more or less; certainly he didn't continue South——"

"It is a most mysterious affair," said Ranleigh, "and a little disquieting, though the fact that the fellow has gone away after taking a look at us seems

to indicate that he means no harm to us. Very likely he is some wandering Indian who saw our fire and from curiosity decided to take a look at us."

Purnell nodded. "That seems the most reasonable explanation, and as we shall be travelling in the direction in which he has gone, we may yet run against him. We can keep a sharp look-out for him at any rate."

But though they did so, they saw nothing of the mysterious stranger, and through the day the only sign of human presences that they encountered were some bare tepee poles half-way up the second of the chain of lakes.

"An Indian fishing camp, from the look of things," said Purnell. "I wonder where they have their winter encampment."

Ranleigh shook his head. "There's no telling. But I think we shall do well to keep a bright look-out for them. The Nahonis have a bad reputation among their neighbours according to one travel-book that I read. That man who reconnoitred our camp last night might well belong to them."

"More than likely," agreed Purnell.

Through the day, however, they saw no further indication of the presence of man. The land was silent, a mere frozen picture of desolation, themselves the only moving figures in the snow-burdened landscape, and at the head of the third lake they camped for the night. No untoward incident disturbed their slumbers, and the following day they pushed on once more, leaving the lake behind them and passing the main branch of the river. From that point onward both the white men were conscious of a mounting excitement. They were approaching the point where they must leave the icy trail of the growing Porcupine, and follow an unnamed creek that led through the

hills to a lake that was not indicated upon the map. They watched the left bank carefully, and as the country began to lift, great hills towering ahead, they knew that they were approaching the point of departure from the main trail. They reached it towards the middle of the third day after leaving the lakes. A defile opened between the hills, filled by a stream which in the open season could have been but little better than a series of rapids, and as they saw it Ranleigh called a halt.

"The fifth creek," he said. "This must be the turning-place."

"A cheerful-looking gateway to El Dorado," commented Purnell, eyeing the sombre defile distastefully. "It might be the mouth of hell. Makes you think of the old screed 'All hope abandon——' But come on. We haven't come so far to be scared by the look of a gut in the hills."

They turned into the creek, to find the toil of the trail immeasurably increased. Within two miles they came upon no less than three ice-jams, and since the nature of the defile made it impossible to skirt them, the sleds had to be unpacked, and lifted over the obstructions. At the end of the five miles they were utterly exhausted, and with night falling around them were forced to encamp.

"Stefanson must have had a nerve to penetrate this country by himself," remarked Purnell after supper. "I wouldn't care to do it."

"Nor would I," agreed his partner. "He probably had some one with him. Indian or half-breed."

"What's the matter with a white partner?" asked Purnell suddenly. "It seems the likeliest thing."

"I never thought of that!" said Ranleigh quickly. "In that case we may find him in possession."

"Stefanson never mentioned anyone but his sister. But he was dying and hadn't much time. It would queer our pitch a good deal though if he did leave some one behind up here."

Ranleigh lifted his head and stared up at the stars shining frostily over the snow-covered heights. "I should say he had not much need to leave a guard. This creek itself is sufficient. There isn't one prospector in a hundred that would do more than wash a pan of dirt at its mouth to test for gold. Any man happening along here in spring or summer would be discouraged by the nature of the stream. It must be a sight worse than Thirty-mile."

"Yes! Ten times worse! How anyone could make it alone, I can't think."

"Well, we shall find out whether Stefanson left anyone behind to-morrow or the day after at the furthest, I should think."

In the bitter darkness, with the stars shining high above the hills, the following morning they resumed their journey. Presently the hills began to open out a little, timber grew more plentiful, the trail was easier to follow, and then quite unexpectedly rounding a spur of hill they came in view of the lake, surrounded by high hills, which on their lower slopes were heavily timbered. As they passed out of the defile on to the frozen surface of the lake's self, they halted the dogs, and looked round. There was no wind at the moment; but that it was a place of winds was shown by the fantastic wind-rows of snow that abounded everywhere, and it was clear that in spite of the unearthly silence that brooded over the place, at any hour through some change in atmospheric pressure it might become a howling hell of wind and snowdust. It had a circumference of perhaps four miles, ringed by hills on every side with no break at any point so far as could

be seen, except the defile from which they had emerged. Nothing moved on its surface. Its shores betrayed no sign of sentient life, and the hills about it stood like grim sentinels that had watched the place and guarded it from intrusion since the beginning of time.

"Worse than Nahoni," said Ranleigh in a subdued voice.

"Yes!" agreed his partner. "I wouldn't be left here alone for all the gold in Alaska. A man would go raving mad in a week."

"I wonder where Stefanson pitched his camp," said the baronet, looking round. "Somewhere in the neighbourhood of the gold-lode, I expect."

"Sure! There's nothing for it but to make a circuit, I suppose."

"The sooner the better."

Without further delay they began the circuit of the lake, carefully scanning the shore for any sign of human occupation. They found none until they had traversed a third of the distance, then the Indian gave a sudden sharp cry, and pointed to a level place on the side of a hill. Looking in the direction he indicated, the two white men were amazed to see a high cross outlined in snow. For a moment they stared in wonder, and then leaving Canim with the dogs they climbed up to the place, and when they reached it, looked at the cross carefully. It was made of spruce, the cross piece carefully fitted, and the mound at the foot of it left them in no doubt that it marked the last resting-place of some adventurer who, defying the terrors of the wilderness, had laid down his life. Taking out his knife, Purnell began to scrape away the snow from the front of the cross; and as indications of an inscription appeared, rubbed it vigorously with his mitten. After a little time they

were able to make out the letters carved on each arm of the cross :

“OSCAR STEFANSON.”

As Purnell finished spelling it out aloud, he offered comment : “ So Stefanson did not come alone. The man who lies here—his brother possibly—came with him. I wonder how he died.” As he finished speaking he looked round the lonely lake, and then added : “ I should think the camping-ground was not far from here. It is not a country in which a solitary man could carry the body of another far.”

“ You forget ! Stefanson was up here in summer. He would have a canoe. At any rate, he would have to go south by water. He might select this place for the grave, and bring——”

“ Yes ! ” Purnell looked round again. “ From the look of things it was chosen to give a view of the lake—sort of Nebo from which the dead might look out on the promised land.” He broke off, and then ejaculated : “ God ! I wonder how many white men have so left their bones up here in the shadow of the Circle ? ”

“ Hundreds, I imagine,” said the baronet quietly. “ But there is no use lingering here. The poor fellow is beyond caring, anyway.”

They made their way back to the lake, and resumed their march, and twenty minutes later had another surprise, for rounding a high bluff, they came quite suddenly upon a roughly-built cabin. No smoke came from its stone-built chimney, and its doorway was half-hidden in drifted snow.

“ Stefanson’s camping-place,” cried Ranleigh.

“ No one else’s, surely ! ” said Purnell. They moved towards it, cleared away the snow from the door, found the leathern thong which served for latch-string,



and tugging it pressed against the rough door. It yielded easily, and as they passed inside, they found that some attempt had been made to furnish it. A rough table had been constructed, a couple of rude chairs, whilst a double bunk filled one corner of the little cabin. In addition there was a rusted stove, a pair of blankets and, oddest thing of all, a tattered copy of Shakespeare in which were written Oscar Stefanson's name, with an address in Seattle. As he read it, Ranleigh nodded.

"The Stefansons built this place right enough. They probably meant to winter here, and when Oscar passed on his brother found the place too much for him and went out to get a new partner, only to be shot on the Dyea trail. But I wonder where the gold is? Somewhere close at hand, I fancy?"

"Suppose we take a look round, whilst Canim lights a fire?"

"Yes! We ought to know the truth of Stefanson's story inside five minutes."

They went outside, descended to the level of the lake, and looked round. The bluff which they had rounded held their attention but for a moment, then they moved forward towards a place where a sloping cliff rose sheer from the lake. Purnell gave one look at it, then he gripped his friend's arm.

"Stefanson was no liar. Look there!"

Ranleigh looked. Slanting across the cliff was a great vein that gleamed dully on its dark face, as the wintry sunlight fell upon it. For a moment Ranleigh stared at it incredulously. Then he gave a laugh like that of a drunken man.

"A double handful of gold."

"A double handful," cried the other. "There are tons in that cliff, man."

"But there's a double handful for Edith van Cor-

low," laughed Ranleigh again. "And for the rest I don't care a damn." Then for the first time Purnell heard of the promise, and as he looked on the treasure-laden cliff he also laughed a little shakily.

"You'll be able to give the lady good measure, pressed down and running over!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE GREY WOLF

ON the night of their discovery of Stefanson's great vein of gold, the two partners sat discussing how it was to be worked.

"The quartz is rotten all round the bottom of the cliff," said Purnell. "There's free gold there in plenty. I expect that's where Stefanson got the nuggets he had with him. Just lifted it out with the point of a pick, I'll wager. And there's lots we can get out that way: more than enough to pay for the machinery we shall want, and for its transport up here. We shall need workmen too, but we shall be able to pay them easily enough; and by the time we're ready to start there'll be plenty of men to be had in Dawson. The place will be packed by spring."

"There are men starving there now, I'll swear."

"There'll be more in a month or two. We shall get them easily enough, but we can't make a move that way until we can arrange to feed them. The best thing will be to introduce the smallest number of men that we can work with, on some kind of share system."

"We shall have plenty of time to think out details before we go down to Dawson—as one of us must—to record the claim."

"Yes! And first thing to-morrow morning we must stake it. We don't want anyone to come along and jump a claim that is worth millions. But they

won't do that." Purnell laughed hardly. "I'd hold them off with the rifle."

"There's not much fear——" Ranleigh broke off sharply and looked at the Indian, who had most unexpectedly risen to his feet, and was staring towards the cabin door with a tense look on his face. "What is it, Canim?"

"Some man come!" said the Indian laconically. "I hear dogs."

Neither of the white men had heard anything, and Purnell looked at the Indian a little incredulously.

"Sure you're not dreaming, Canim?"

"I quite sure! I hear—dere!"

This time both the white men heard the sharp yelp a dog makes when it is cut with a whip. They looked at each other quickly.

"The man at Lake Nahoni!" exclaimed Ranleigh.

"Just what I was thinking," answered Purnell.

"He may have followed us! In which case——"

Ranleigh broke off, but the American understood his unfinished thought: "He must have seen us examining the cliff. That seems likely enough. Question is, who is he, and what are we going to do with him if he comes here?"

"We must be guided by circumstances. After all, he may not be the man who watched us at Nahoni. He may not even have seen the cabin."

Purnell pointed to the parchment window. He's bound to see the light, and in any case if he has a nose on him at all he can't help smelling the burning spruce."

Again a sound reached them, this time the eager whine of dogs conscious that they are reaching the end of a trail. Ranleigh rose sharply to his feet, and from the holster attached to the belt he had thrown aside, took out his pistol.

"If it should happen to be any of the Slackman crowd——" he began, and then gave a short laugh. "One never knows——"

"No!" answered Purnell, standing also, and drawing his own pistol. "As you say, one never knows."

Canim the Indian was already on his feet, and in a tense silence the three waited, the two white men with pistols in their hands, the Indian with his right hand gripping the knife at his belt. They heard the sled-team halt outside the cabin, caught the sound of a voice speaking in gutturals that none of them understood, then a whipstock rapped upon the door.

"Come in!" cried Ranleigh in response, and they heard a hand fumbling with the latch-string.

"Talks Indian to his dogs," whispered Purnell quickly; "but understands English. I wonder——"

The latch lifted and the door opened on his words, and as the new-comer entered the room the eyes of the three men focused upon him. He was very tall; his fine-featured face was tanned and weather-beaten until it was almost the colour of mahogany; from head to foot he was dressed in attire that was obviously of native workmanship, but his eyes were blue, his hair when he threw back the hood of his parka was perfectly silvery and fine beyond what any native hair ever is, and as he slipped his hands from the fur mittens a diamond gleamed on one of them.

"A white man!" thought Ranleigh to himself, and the next moment the impression was confirmed by the stranger's greeting.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I am afraid I have startled you a little."

He glanced with amusement at the pistol openly displayed in Purnell's hand, and with a laugh the American thrust the weapon back to its holster.

"You're right, stranger," he said. "Of course we

didn't know who the caller might be, and as we're new to the country we're naturally a little cautious."

"Rightly so, I imagine," answered the new-comer. "But you won't refuse shelter to a man on trail. There's a snap in the air to-night that makes the warmth of a cabin desirable."

The stranger's voice, though it had a hint of native gutturals, was a cultured one, and as he spoke the blue eyes fixed themselves upon Ranleigh questioningly.

"You are welcome, of course," said the baronet quickly. "We know the law of the North which gives food and blanket and fire to the man on trail. If you will make yourself at home, we shall be glad."

"Thank you," said the man. "Then, first I will feed my dogs."

He slid his hands into the mittens, pulled the hood over his head, and went outside again, carefully closing the door behind him. A moment later they caught the clamour of the dogs as the stranger fed them; and again, mingling with the crack of the whip and the snarling of the quadrupeds, they caught the Indian speech.

"Wonder who he is?" said Purnell in a questioning voice.

"No Indian, anyway," replied Ranleigh thoughtfully, "though clearly he is quite at home up here." He glanced at the Indian. "What do you think about him, Canim?"

"I think," said the Indian in the grave way of his people, "he is de Grey Wolf."

"The Grey Wolf? Who is he?"

"He is the Chief of the Nahonis. Of him all Indians have heard. He is of white blood and a very great chief. Long has he been here—many years before

the madness of gold brought white men flocking into the land."

"Where did he come from?" asked Ranleigh quickly.

"Who knows?" said the Indian with a shake of his head. "Some say dat he came from a whaling ship where the sea turns to ice and where the igloos of the Nuna-talmutes are; dat he fled southward through the winter, and was lost for two whole winters. I not know; but de tale is told dat at the end of de second winter he came to a camp of the Nahonis riding a musk-ox as a man rides a horse; and as in their eyes he was a god he remained with them, becoming first their Shaman, and then their Chief. He is a great warrior, and before de gold-seeking men came he made de Nahonis greatly feared in de land. He——"

"S-s-s-h-h!"

The latch-string was tugged, the door opened, and again the stranger entered. He must have guessed they had been discussing him, but he gave no sign; and whilst Purnell prepared a meal he talked freely of many things—of the early winter, the earliest he had known in twenty-five years; of the influx of white men on the Yukon and its possible effect on the development of the country and of other things; but of himself beyond the incidental revelation that he had been many years in the land, he gave no information whatever. And whilst he talked, again and again his eyes fixed themselves upon Ranleigh with an intensity of gaze that was almost embarrassing to him.

When the meal was ready the stranger ate with evident relish, whilst he still talked. "I have not been here before for some months," he said. "But I heard that in the summer two men arrived here, one of whom died, whilst the second turned South again. Did you know that?"

"We met the one who went South," answered Purnell.

"What became of him?"

"He was shot on the Dyea trail, some months back."

"And you have come to get the gold which he found?"

"You know of that?" cried Purnell quickly.

"None better. Before Carmac made his strike and set all the world running this way, I knew of it. There is much gold in the hills and rivers that the prospectors have not found."

"You knew—and it didn't trouble you?" cried Purnell in wonder. "You didn't want to get it?"

"I have all the gold I need," said the stranger with a laugh, "and if I want more, I know where it is to be found. I do not want this district to become like Dawson, and it is not likely to do so, unless the men who come here blaze their discoveries abroad—as there is no need they should."

"But they're bound to come," broke in Purnell. "The Stefansons came here; we have come. Sooner or later men will drift down the rivers and pole up the creeks in driblets; and no man can stop them."

"You think not?" said the stranger enigmatically. "The people who own this land, and have had it as their hunting-ground for many generations, may think otherwise."

"You mean Indians?" said Purnell a trifle contemptuously.

"Yes! If they opposed the coming of the gold-seekers, how far would the latter get? They cannot come as an army; they must come in driblets as you said, and if the driblets do not go back, who will inquire about them? Who will trouble about their fate? The chances of the wilderness, flood and frost and the empty food-pack are so many."

"But Indians wouldn't dare——"

"You think not?" interrupted the stranger. "Listen! Many years ago, before the Americans bought Alaska and before the boundary was fixed, a party of Russians came up the Yukon and began to explore the country. They quarrelled with the Indians about the women, and in the end they were told to go back. They refused, and built themselves a stockade. They held the place for three whole weeks, having weapons of precision whilst the Indians had only gas-pipe rifles that they had obtained from the traders; but in the end the Russians died to a man, and the stockade they had built became their funeral pyre. There are men still living who remember that battle, and to-day they have repeating rifles; and as they are determined to live according to the custom of their fathers, who will deny them if they turn the gold-seekers back?"

As the man asked his question, Purnell broke out a trifle heatedly: "Look here, stranger, are you giving us warning to quit?"

The man laughed. "Not exactly that," he answered. "I am merely saying that I will not have the land overrun with white men who will debauch the Indians, rob them, treat them with contumely, destroy them with rotten whisky and——"

"But you are a white man?" broke in Ranleigh quietly.

"By birth, yes; but by adoption I am a red man!"

"You say *you* will not have these white men come?" asked Purnell sharply. "How will you prevent them? Who are you to talk like that?"

The man turned to the Indian. "Have you heard of the Grey Wolf?"

"Yes," replied the Indian humbly. "Just now I told these white men, my masters, of him."



The man smiled. "Then you will have no difficulty in understanding my authority. I am the Grey Wolf."

"The Chief of the Nahonis?"

"Chief and Shaman!"

"You have come to dictate terms?" asked the baronet quietly.

"I have come to offer terms, though I might dictate them," answered the Grey Wolf quietly. "I know how you men of my race covet gold. So did I in my youth—and therefore I am here to-day, the Chief of an alien race."

For a moment the man was silent, and a sombre look came on his face and a light of abstraction in his eyes, and Ranleigh had a sudden conviction that the man was looking back into dark events of his life. Then he spoke again: "I will not have the land overrun, but for special reasons I will allow you two men to take out the gold—on conditions."

"And those conditions?" snapped Purnell.

"That you bring no one else up here, and that when you take the gold out you do not say where it was found!"

"But how are we to work it?"

"A few sticks of giant powder will bring down that cliff. You will be able to dig out all the gold a man needs with a hand-pick. Besides, there is gold in the lake and the water is shallow."

"And if we refuse?" asked Ranleigh quietly.

"If you are wise, you will not!"

"But if we do?"

"There are three ways you can be dealt with," answered the stranger with amazing coolness. "You can be taken with your dogs to the three lakes, and set to make the traverse back to the Yukon; you can be sent away from here now without dogs or pro-

visions ; or you can be kept up here until your stores run out and then left to eat the gold you gather. It is very simple."

"Simple!" The American gave a sudden harsh laugh, and a second later his pistol was in his hand. "A thought too simple, Mr. Grey Wolf. What's to prevent us shooting you out of hand?"

"Come, and I will show you," answered the stranger quietly.

He rose to his feet as he spoke, and moved towards the cabin door. The others followed him wonderingly as he threw open the door and stepped outside. Overhead the aurora flashed its streamers of light that flickered and wavered like wide silken ribbons in a playful breeze, and the whole surface of the snow-covered lake, with the hills that rimmed it, was clearly visible. The Grey Wolf spoke no word ; but lifting his hands to his mouth trumpet-wise, he gave a sudden long-drawn howl like that of the wolf when it calls the pack to meat. Scarcely had it ceased to echo, when the answer came from all sides ; and, whilst the partners watched, a score of dark figures appeared from different points and began to converge on the cabin. The Grey Wolf waved his hand towards them.

"If you shoot, my friend," he said, smiling to Purnell, "how will you escape the pack?"

Purnell looked at the hurrying figures, then at the smiling face of the Grey Wolf ; and slid his pistol back into its holster.

"You hold the trumps," he replied with a short laugh.

"I thought you would see that," answered the stranger, then he lifted his hands and gave another signal. The hurrying figures checked, and a moment later began to withdraw. Then the Grey Wolf turned

to the partners. "Suppose we continue the discussion indoors. It is very cold in the open."

They returned to the cabin, and as they seated themselves once more the stranger spoke. "That was but part of the pack," he said quietly. "There are three hundred fighting men all told, so you can measure the chances of resistance, and if you are wise you will agree." He looked from Purnell to Ranleigh, who was watching him with perplexed eyes. "You are wondering whether your partner ought not to shoot me?"

"No," answered the baronet quickly, "I am wondering where I have met a man very like you before."

The Grey Wolf smiled quietly. "Every man in the world has his double," he answered. "For me the question is, do you agree to my terms?"

Purnell looked at Ranleigh, and the latter nodded.

"Needs must when the devil drives!" said the American a little angrily.

"And you?" asked the stranger, looking keenly at Ranleigh.

"Yes!" said the baronet simply.

"Then there's an end of the discussion," said the Grey Wolf. "And a better end for you than you guess. You will keep the compact, I know; and in return I shall save you from interference. So long as you are up here, you will not be molested either by my Indians or your own kind." He rose abruptly. "I thank you for your hospitality and——"

"You are going?" cried Ranleigh.

"At once," replied the Grey Wolf smilingly. "I shall sleep in my own cabin to-night."

"Where is that?" asked the Englishman impulsively.

"Back of the hills there. One day you shall visit

me, and see in what state a—a renegade may live.” He laughed as he spoke, and there was a touch of bitterness in his laughter that startled the partners. Then as he reached the door he turned round. “There are things you may need, that you did not bring with you—giant powder, for instance? I will send you that in a few days if you like.”

“We shall be grateful,” answered Ranleigh.

“Then you will watch for my messenger!”

He opened the door and went outside, and following a sudden impulse, Ranleigh accompanied him, and stood watching whilst the man harnessed his dogs. When the task was finished the Grey Wolf stood upright, and abruptly offered his hand. The baronet took it without hesitation.

“Au revoir, my friend.”

“Au revoir—friend,” replied Ranleigh impulsively.

For one moment the Grey Wolf looked at him, almost appealingly, hesitated as if about to say something, visibly altered his mind, cracked his whip, cried to his dogs, and as the team started he gave again the howl of the wolf. Again the dark figures appeared from various points; and as the Grey Wolf with his sled team began to make for the sombre woods at the head of the lake, the dark figures also went that way. Stamping his feet to keep them from freezing, Ranleigh waited until the last had disappeared, then he re-entered the cabin, to find Purnell plying the Indian with questions about their mysterious visitor. But to all his questions the Indian replied with a stolid shake of the head.

“I not know. He is de Grey Wolf and a very great Chief. Dat is all!”

“What d’you make of him, Ranleigh?” asked the American.

“I don’t know what to think!”

"It is like a dime novel. A white Chief of Indians. The thing is unheard of."

"No!" answered Ranleigh. "Down at Athabasca Landing on the Peace there is a story of an Englishman who went up-river wearing a monocle and taking with him a whole mountain of luggage. He was the complete dude when he went in, and two years afterwards he was Chief of a tribe of Dog Ribs, with a dusky daughter of the tribe for wife. So Grey Wolf is not a unique exception."

"Well, we're in the hollow of his hand, anyhow," said Purnell gloomily.

"And under the shadow of his protection," replied Ranleigh, "so it isn't all loss. We shall be able to work the gold without interruption from Slackman and his crowd, if by any chance they should find their way up here—though I don't see how they can."

"If the Wolf keeps his word——"

"You don't doubt that he will?" asked the baronet, interrupting.

"No!" replied his partner with a short laugh. "He struck me as a fellow who wouldn't go back on what he said, and by the look of him he's a pretty determined character."

"Then we've little need to worry. We're free of the country on conditions; and we can work this gold at leisure. Things might be a great deal worse."

"True," laughed Purnell. "By this time if that fellow had wanted, his pack might have made their kill, and we'd have been down among the dead men. After all, though I didn't like the fellow's hectoring, the situation has its advantages."

"A good many, I should say!"

"I wonder who the fellow is? He's not the ordinary trail-beater who joins himself to the natives and takes an Indian wife. The man has been somebody

in his time before he slipped into the Lost Legion."

"And he is somebody now!" said Ranleigh thoughtfully. "He's a power in the land."

"Well, it's no use grinding our brains to pulp trying to solve the dime mystery," laughed Purnell. "It's enough to have the power on our side, I guess. It beats me though how any man can know of that cliff outside and not want the gold that is in it; and I can't think how any fellow can deliberately live up here, when away South there's New York, Paris—all the cities of delight that he could buy with the gold to his hand."

"Tastes differ," said Ranleigh. "Some men like the barbaric, and——" He broke off, paused and then added quietly: "And some men seek oblivion from the past; willing to let the world that once knew them forget them utterly, whilst they try to forget themselves."

"You think Grey Wolf is of that breed?"

"I am sure of it," answered Ranleigh, and remembering the dark look of abstraction he had seen on the stranger's face added with conviction: "But he has not forgotten, and he will never forget. You heard that reference to his youth——"

"By Jove, yes! I wonder what the fellow did to outlaw himself?"

"It's no use guessing!" said Ranleigh. "We shall never know; I expect it was not the kind of thing a man ever tells about himself. Better turn in and get some sleep, for there is a great deal to do to-morrow."

But two hours afterwards, when Purnell's heavy breathing told that he was sleeping soundly, Ranleigh himself was still awake, his mind busy with the mysterious visitor. He remembered the appealing look upon the man's face in the moment of farewell, remembered

also the hesitation when he was about to speak, and wondered what words had been on the man's lips. But wondering brought no answer, and presently, his brain weary of the mystery, he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XIV

## A DRAMATIC MEETING

IT was almost a week after the visit of the Grey Wolf to the cabin when Purnell, for the hundredth time in four days, went to the door to look out. Instead of the expanse of the lake with its fringe of pines and encircling hills, he saw a mere smother of snow.

"Ugh!" he grunted, as he shut the door. "Still at it. I don't believe it is ever going to stop."

Four days had passed since the beginning of the fall. First the great flakes had fallen out of a greasy-looking sky, fluffy like swansdown, in a steady unhurried descent, that had quickened after an hour or two, and in less than half a day had added a foot to the snow which already mantled the landscape. Then the wind had come and with its coming the character of the snow changed. It no longer fell fluffily like great feathers. The flakes were broken up into icy particles, the snow whirled in clouds of hard shot-like morsels, the true snow of the North.

The wind lifted the snow that had already fallen, joined it with that which was still falling, and whirled it before it in a cloud against which nothing could stand. It temporarily obliterated everything. The muffling sheet of white drove against pine and hemlock, turning them into white ghosts of themselves, or sometimes by its fury snapped them like straws, and uprooted trees that had seen a century of such storms, but in their pride and strength were thrown down at

last. Under the assault, the cabin shook until it seemed to be in a state of continuous vibration ; fine dust of snow was driven in through chinks that even close search could not have found, and there was a growing deposit of this snow-dust over everything that was not in immediate range of the fire, whilst the cold was so intense that within three yards of the stove the breath was frozen to a snowy vapour.

Through these days the partners had hugged the stove, devising plans, making guesses as to the Grey Wolf's story, and grumbling at the great storm which was probably the last before the approach of spring, since every drop of moisture would be frozen out of the atmosphere by the time it ended.

But by the end of the day the change came. The wind became less steady and ceased to shake the cabin continuously, though still the gusts smote it as with a giant flail ; and still at times the shot-like snow rattled upon it in futile assault. Then the gusts became less frequent, and in the night finally ceased ; and with the passing of the wind the snow ceased to fall, so that on the fifth morning, when again Ranleigh looked forth, it was on a world wonderfully white and marvellously still. The sky was hard and steel-like with not a cloud from horizon to horizon ; the hills, white from crest to foot, were clearly limned ; and the only breaks in the prevailing whiteness of the landscape were the patches of wood, which in spite of the plastered snow still showed black against the dazzling white groundwork.

" It's blown itself out at last, thank Heaven ! " said Purnell, as he shut the door. " But there'll be no working on that cliff face to-day. It's too cold. After breakfast I shall take a rifle and go as far as the lower end of the lake. There should be game abroad after this storm."



"A good idea," commented Ranleigh. "We can very well do with an addition to the larder. Canim and I will clean this stuff out of the cabin, and replenish the wood-pile, whilst you are away. It seems to me that if this storm is a sample of what the weather up here can do, we ought to have a stack of logs as big as a Broadway sky-scraper."

Purnell laughed. "We've certainly consumed some these four days."

Breakfast over, carrying his rifle, and wearing snow-shoes, the American started; moving down the lake towards woods which seemed to him as a likely place for moose to have yarded. The air was cold but intensely dry, and, as he found, wonderfully invigorating. He could have sung as he moved along over the white surface well packed by the wind; and under the steel-blue sky with the sun mounting in cold brightness. He was glad of the sunlight in this white world, for though it had no warmth, it yet added to the mounting sense of exhilaration of which he was conscious.

As he moved down the lake he used his eyes freely, staring about him alertly, noting how the hills everywhere enclosed the lake; and watching carefully for any sign of the game which was the reason for his expedition. It was to the woods that his eyes continually turned; for he knew that no moose would venture the open lake with its deep covering of snow, unless driven forth by wolves; for its great bulk unfits it for travel in such conditions, which is one of the reasons why in winter it clings to the woods, making that amazing criss-cross of trails, running for miles, along which it feeds and which constitute a moose-yard. With this in his mind he began to work towards the farther shore where the woods were thick, that he might the better reconnoitre them for

any signs that would indicate the presence of the game for which he was looking.

This slight change of direction was followed by something of which at first he took no notice. It brought the sun almost directly in his eyes; and this with the glare of the reflection from the snows, after a little time, caused him to march with half-closed eyes. He went forward with unbent head, however, engrossed in his search and paying but little attention to the growing discomfort of his eyes. He reached the lower end of the lake without discovering any sign of game; but there he made a discovery that interested him profoundly, namely, that there was another outlet from the lake than the one of which he was aware.

It ran between low hills with the sun directly in front of him, shining down the valley; and wondering where it led, he started impulsively to explore it. The sunlight troubled him a good deal as he pressed forward. The white-mantled landscape began to grow prismatic to his gaze, flashing with rainbow colour; but knowing nothing of the meaning of this, he continued his march. When a fox, the first sign of life that he had seen, crossed the trail it seemed to move in a nimbus of opalescent light; and at the same moment he was conscious of a dull pain in his forehead, which, as he marched on, became more acute.

The prismatic hues of visible things grew more pronounced; and presently he realized that it was the glare of the sun on the dazzling snow which was distorting his vision, and once the thought crossed his mind that it might be as well to return, or at any rate to get his back to the sun. But the lure of the valley drew him on. He burned to find out where it led, and screwing his eyes until they were the merest slits, he pressed forward, stopping only once to light

his pipe and slightly burning a finger in the flame of the match which was almost invisible in the strong light.

The valley began to open out and the light grew broader, causing him nearly to close his eyelids for protection. But knowing that soon he would be able to return, he pressed forward, and then started to climb a hill which promised a view of what lay beyond. The hill, like most hills, was deceptive. It led from one height to another, luring him farther than he had intended to go, bringing him more into the sunlight, and as he went the prismatic corona attached itself to everything that came in the purview of his eyes, whilst the dull pain behind his frontal bone lost its dullness and became an acute headache. But he persevered until he reached a crest that gave him a view of what lay beyond the valley that he followed.

The valley, as it seemed, led to another small lake, the snow-covered expanse of which glittered and danced before his now wide-open eyes. Beyond it lay a further line of hills, whose contours he could make out only dimly through the rainbow hues that seemed to be part of them ; and whilst he still stared, his eyes instinctively resting on those folds in the hills that were in shadow, the brightness seemed to fade from the landscape, and a mist appeared to obliterate the whole scene from view. He looked towards the low-lying sun, and saw it through coloured shadows that seemed to wheel and circle, in and out, like the moving figures thrown upon the screen by magic lantern operators for the amusement of children.

"By Jove," he muttered, "my eyes are sure going back on me. It's time that I was getting out of this !" He turned to pick up his rifle, which he had rested against a snow-covered rock whilst he made his survey, and for a moment he missed seeing it ; and it

was only when he had found it by groping that its shape limned itself before his eyes, transitorily, for it came and went, and whilst one moment he saw it, the next he did not.

Thoroughly alarmed, he started to descend the hill, trying vainly to follow his own trail ; but failing to see it half the time, and finally losing it altogether. With every step, the world seemed to grow darker. He looked for the sun but could not see it, though it still hung in the southern heavens. He knew now that he was threatened with snow-blindness, but he was not yet alarmed. He had but to reach the foot of the hill, turn to the left, and the course of the valley would bring him to the lake upon which the cabin stood. By then, marching with his back to the sun and with shut lids, his eyes would experience some relief, and doubtless he would be able to see his way. At any rate, he would be able to shout, and either Ranleigh or Canim would hear him and come to his help. It would be all right.

But he reckoned without the chances of disaster that wait for a man situated as he was, and his optimism proved to be without justification. Having lost his own trail, and anxious to get back to the lake, he was a little reckless in his descent ; and when approaching the foot of the hill, he stepped on a snow-wreath at the edge of a small cliff, which promptly yielded and shot him into space.

The fall was not a serious one in itself. At any time Purnell would have jumped the distance and thought nothing of it. But for all that it was one of the chances that for a man in his position might tip the balance for life or death. He fell in a smother of deep snow, which half-choked him, and by the time he had scrambled out he had lost both snowshoes and his rifle. Those losses in themselves were bad

enough ; but they were nothing to another loss, which he sensed as he stood upright, panting and blinking in what now was complete blindness. In his fall he had entirely lost all sense of direction !

As he realized that, he was conscious of a pang of real fear ; and in one flashing moment he visioned himself, wandering blindly over the white waste like a lost child, moving after a time drunkenly and in circles, and finally dropping from exhaustion, to pass into the quick sleep of death that is induced by intense cold. The next moment, however, he shut the vision from him resolutely. There was nothing to be gained by yielding to despair. What was needed now was coolness and judgment. He must make no mistake. At all costs, by some means he must discover the right trail to follow. Perhaps if he waited for a little time with shut eyes a moment's respite from the blackness might be given him, and if only for one fleeting second he could discern the hills he knew that he would be able to determine his course. He tried the experiment. Closing his eyes tightly, and cupping his mittened hands over them in order to exclude all light, he waited for a time, hoping that the rest would achieve the desired end. Then very deliberately he dropped his hands and opened his eyes, but saw nothing except the opal mist behind which all external things seemed to have hidden themselves.

He was bitterly disappointed, but he tried again, waiting a yet longer time with his eyes covered ; and this time, instead of looking for the hills, he tried to discern the sun, knowing that to return to the cabin he must have it at his back. With a voiceless prayer in his heart he removed his hands, lifted his face and opened his eyes. The opalescent mist blanketed even the sun ; and though he turned this way and then that, facing so far as he could judge the four

points of the compass, at no point could he be sure that the mist which hid the world from him was less dense than at some other point.

Again fear set cold hands upon his heart ; but again he crushed down the rising sense of despair, and made a further effort of thought, searching for some way of deliverance from the fate that threatened him. After a time a scheme occurred to him. The valley was not a very wide one, and it ought to be possible for him to reach one side or the other without any very great trouble. The nearer side was the one where he had fallen, and that with his back to the cabin was on the right ; and a minute's walk ought to bring him on the rising ground. If he found that he had but to turn to the right, and soon he would pass out of the valley to the lake and so into sight of the cabin. If he did not find it in a very short walk, he would know that he was marching wrong, and would have to make another attempt.

He tried, hopefully enough, and moved forward cautiously with hands outstretched, like a blind child. He walked some distance without finding any obstruction, and then paused irresolutely. By this he ought to have hit against the cliff over which he had fallen, and he must be moving in the wrong direction. Very carefully he right-about-faced and walked forward again, stumblingly in the deep snow. He found nothing to block his way, and deciding that he must be walking up or down the valley he again halted. Next he tried a half right turn as well as he could judge, and this time walked some distance before he came to a standstill. He knew now that he was completely lost, that even if he struck any obstruction he could not tell which way to turn. Despair surged in him again, and this time he could not crush it down. He grew panicky, and began to hurry forward

at as great a speed as the deep snow permitted. He fell twice, and the second time when he picked himself up took a fresh grip on himself.

This would not do. There was no sense in just running round. Desperate as his case was, it was not entirely hopeless. He must work on some definite plan. He stood thinking, stamping his feet meanwhile to keep them from freezing. It was clear to him that if he walked forward for some distance he must reach one lake or the other, and that the chances as to which he would reach were evenly divided. If he walked a certain distance and reached the right lake, the firing of his pistol might bring Ranleigh or Canim to his help. If, on the contrary, he arrived at the lake which he had seen from the hill, he would be farther away from succour when his friend, alarmed at his non-arrival at the cabin, took up his trail as he undoubtedly would. He could not stand still. To do that was to freeze; so he decided to take the desperate chance, and began to move forward once more.

With his hands in front of him, like one uncertain of what lay ahead and groping in darkness, he progressed for some time, not in a straight line but with an unconscious bias towards the left, which as it happened was the line which the valley followed. It was hard work walking through the deep snow, and several times he stopped for a brief rest; and the last time, putting his hands to his mouth trumpet-wise, he gave a loud shout.

“Hallo-o-o-o!”

The sound of his voice woke many echoes, but they were all from surfaces close at hand as he could tell from the quickness of their return, and from that he knew that no matter in which direction he was travelling he was still in the valley.

He moved forward once more, and continued walking for what seemed to him quite a long time; then once more he shouted, and this time, to his extreme amazement and delight, a voice replied:

"Hallo-o-o-o!"

It sounded thin and far-away; but he knew that it was not an echo, for unless his ears deceived him utterly it was a woman's voice.

He shouted again, madly, exultantly, his heart pounding with hope, and again the voice replied:

"Hallo-o-o-o!"

"Help!" he cried. "Help! Oh! Help!"

His appeal was followed by three shots from his pistol which set the echoes ringing, and as they died away, the voice of the unknown person to whom he appealed sounded once more:

"Coming! Coming!"

Relieved from fear and despair, he remained where he was, shouting from time to time to guide his unseen deliverer, but desisted when presently his ears caught the crunch of snowshoes on the crusted snow. He waited expectantly, impatiently as the sound drew nearer, turning his unseeing eyes in the direction from which it came; then the crunch of the snowshoes ceased and a woman's voice asked wonderingly:

"Who are you? What is the matter?"

"I am snowblind, and I am lost!"

"Snowblind!"

After the word there was silence for a moment, and though he could not see her he guessed that the unknown woman was staring at him curiously, and he waited until she should speak again, whilst he himself wondered who she could be.

"Which way do you want to go?" asked the woman after a little pause.

"I am not sure," he said. "There are two lakes



here. One at each end of the valley where we stand. It is the northern lake from which I have come, and where my friends are ! ”

“ Your name ? ” asked the woman quickly. “ Tell me that. I am curious.”

“ George Washington Purnell,” he answered with a deprecating laugh. “ I was helpless when it was bestowed upon me, or——”

“ Purnell ? ” broke in the woman quickly. “ Did you say Purnell ? ”

“ Yes ! ” he answered.

“ Ah ! ”

As he caught the exclamation there was something in the quality of it that startled him—gratification, anger, menace. Amazed at the sound, he stared with his unseeing eyes towards the woman, and asked abruptly : “ What is the matter ? You know my name ? You have heard——”

“ You ask me that ? ” asked the woman in a voice that throbbed with anger. “ You do not know who I am or you would not ask. Neither would you ask my help, rather would you wander in the snow until the cold killed you.”

“ But I do not understand at all,” he began amazedly. “ If——”

“ It is Fate that brings you to me, who was seeking you ! ” said the woman, apparently disregarding his words. “ I thank God ! Now justice can be done ! ”

His astonished ears distinctly caught the words and the sound made by the cocking of a pistol, and thinking that he had to deal with a madwoman he said earnestly : “ I do not know in the least what you mean, and I cannot see you. Tell me your name ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the woman with a hard laugh. “ It is only right that you should know that. I am Hilda Stefanson——”

"Hilda Stefanson!" he cried in astonishment.

"Yes! The sister of the Sverdrup Stefanson whom you shot on the Dyea trail, and now——"

"But I didn't!" he cried. "I saw him shot, and I was with him when he died. He told me——"

"It was you," interrupted the woman harshly. "You were caught red-handed. You would have been hanged by a miners' meeting if your friends had not saved you." She laughed suddenly, coldly, mirthlessly. "But now your friends are not here, and the justice of God has delivered you into my hands. You came up here to steal Sverdrup's gold, and instead you will find death at the hands——"

"But I assure you you are mistaken," he broke in desperately. "The men who accused me and arrested me were after Stefanson's gold. I believe they were responsible for his death. They took from me the papers that he gave me, and were disappointed when they found there was no plan of the country where he had made his strike. They thought I had it, and to make me tell they would have hanged me——"

"But you had the plan!"

"No! I had only a description of the country, which Stefanson gave me before he died. He made me promise that I would find you and give you a half-share; and as those blackguards at Sheep Camp took from me all his papers, and I had not your address and no knowledge beyond that you were at Seattle, I wrote to you, care of one of the Seattle papers, giving you an account of your brother's death, telling you that I was going to seek for his gold, and asking you to communicate your address to me at Dawson. I paid for an advertisement in the paper in the hope that you would see it, and so call for the letter——"

"An advertisement!"

"Yes! It was the best I could do under the circumstances, as you must see if you believe——"

"Oh!" interrupted the woman's voice, "I do not know what to believe. I was told that you were Sverdrup's murderer——"

"Who told you?" asked Purnell quickly.

"One of the men I was with. His name is Slackman——"

"The man who tried to hang me. A three-shell game man, one of a gang who I believe was responsible for your brother's death. How did you get in touch with him?"

"He had my address! He sent a man down to Seattle with the news, asking me to come to Dyea to save a fortune. I caught the next boat; not to save a fortune, but to avenge my brother's murder. Slackman told me about you, and I came in over the ice to Dawson, as he said that you would surely go there! You did. He saw you, and lost you; but he discovered which way you had gone, and as he had not dogs and was short of money he went to a man he knew, who outfitted him splendidly to follow your trail. We lost it when you left the Yukon, but guessing that you were making for the Porcupine we made the traverse, and then lost ourselves in a snow-storm, and now——"

"Slackman is with you still?"

"Yes, and three others, one of them the agent of the man who outfitted him for——"

"And you trust him still?" interrupted Purnell sharply.

"No! I do not think I do. I cannot believe that you are lying. I——"

"Then leave them! Take me to the northern lake, to the cabin which your brother built. We

have found the gold, and the grave of one who I think may have been a relation——”

“Oscar’s grave?”

“Yes. Oscar Stefanson’s grave.”

“My younger brother!” said the woman in a breaking voice. “He lies near?”

“So near that you can stand by the side of it this very day. Come with me——”

“You will swear that you tell me the truth; swear by your own mother’s soul——”

“I swear by all that is holy. Do not mistrust me! You do not know the men you are with. They are utter scoundrels, who——”

“I will go with you!” cried the woman. “I have never liked Slackman. I have felt that he was evil! Come, give me your hand; we will go before——”

“Hallo, Miss Stefanson!”

As a hoarse voice cried the greeting, he heard the woman swing round. Then she gave a little cry.

“What is it?” asked Purnell quickly.

“It is Slackman! He comes this way! He and one of the others. We are too late!”

And as her hand gripped his convulsively, though he could not see her, Purnell knew that she was assailed by desperate fear.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LOVE TRAIL

**F**OR some time after Purnell’s departure, whilst the Indian cleared out the snow from the cabin, Ranleigh busied himself in cutting wood into suitable lengths for the stove, and was so engaged when, glancing towards the head of the lake, to his amazement he saw a dog-team emerge from the shadow of

the woods and move down the white expanse in the direction of the cabin. Ahead breaking the trail was a solitary human figure, and whilst the baronet was staring at it wonderingly Canim came out of the cabin. Ranleigh pointed to the oncoming team.

"What do you make of it, Canim?"

The Indian shook his head. "I not know! Indian perhaps; perhaps white man who come after the gold."

Either of these suggestions might be right, though the former seemed the most probable; and as he stared at the trail-breaker the explanation leaped to Ranleigh's mind:

"It is possibly Grey Wolf's messenger, bringing the giant powder that he promised."

"Maybe," said the Indian, shading his eyes from the cold glare of the sun, and looking steadily in the direction of the approaching traveller. A minute, two minutes passed, and then Canim gave a little grunt of satisfaction:

"Ugh!"

"What is it?" asked Ranleigh quickly.

"Squaw!" said the Indian almost contemptuously, and without another word re-entered the cabin.

The baronet stared at the figure at the head of the advancing team, unbelievably. Canim's eyes must be very good to determine the sex of the traveller at that distance, when all that he himself could discern was a muffled figure methodically breaking trail and packing the snow with the great webbed shoes of the North. Then remembering the binoculars, he hurried into the cabin, and emerged with the glasses in his hands. Lifting them to his eyes he hastily adjusted them, and as he caught sight of the traveller's face, half-masked as it was by the muffling about the mouth, and the wooden snow-goggles that hid the eyes, his heart gave a great bound.

"Lisette!" he cried. "Lisette!"

The next moment he had rushed into the cabin, thrown on his parka, and emerging with a pair of snowshoes hastily adjusted them. Then slipping down to the surface of the lake, he began to move in the direction of the traveller. Long before he reached her he knew that he was not mistaken in her identity, for as they hurried towards each other, and again in sheer gladness he shouted her name, the girl waved the whip in her hand in reply.

Ranleigh moved forward eagerly. As he hurried, he remembered his last conversation with Lisette. She had said then that her father might send for him, and he exulted as he thought that perhaps she herself was the messenger. From his heart he hoped so, and the hope made him so impatient that he forgot the caution that snowshoe travelling requires, and failing to lift the toe of one of the great shoes clear of the snow, was suddenly pitched headlong. By the time he had recovered himself, and was moving forward again, the girl and her team were almost upon him. In the interval she had removed the wooden goggles, and as they met he saw her dark eyes shining like stars.

"Roy!" she said as, slipping off his snowshoes, he caught her in his arms. "Roy!"

"You have come for me, Lisette?" he asked after the greeting. "You have come to take me to your father?"

"Yes," she answered simply. "He desires to talk with you."

"Then I am ready. As soon as you like, we will go to him. This moment if you say so."

Lisette laughed at his impatience. "No," she said. "I must give the dogs a little rest; eat, and in an hour we can take the trail. Then we can reach

him to-night. It will be late, but he will wait for us, perhaps come to meet us—who knows? "

They made their way to the cabin where, when he saw who the traveller was, Canim received her with a deference that rather amazed the baronet as he recalled the contemptuous tone in which the Indian had declared the sex of the traveller whilst she had been far out on the lake. Now the Indian was indefatigable, attending to her comfort, looking after her dogs, and generally ministering to her needs. And when the meal that the girl desired had been cooked and eaten and she had gone out of the cabin, with a gleam in his dark eyes, the Indian listened attentively whilst Ranleigh gave him a message for his partner.

"You will tell Mr. Purnell that I may be away two days, perhaps three; but that there will be no need to worry if I am not back at the end of that time."

The Indian nodded gravely, and Ranleigh continued his message. "You will tell him that Miss Lisette came for me, and that I have gone with her."

"Yes!" said the Indian, the flicker of a smile lighting his mask-like face. "I tell him you have gone to de Grey Wolf."

"The Grey Wolf?" echoed Ranleigh in a startled whisper. "The Grey Wolf?"

"Who else?" asked the Indian. "De girl is his daughter."

For a moment Ranleigh stared at the native in amazement. Oddly enough the possibility of Lisette being anyway related to the white man who had visited the cabin had not occurred to him; and though not for a moment did he doubt the rightness of the Indian's conclusion, he asked gravely: "Are you sure, Canim? How can you know?"

"Nanook is my brother," answered the Indian quietly. "Though he is of de Pellys, for a hundred moons he has served de white chief of de Nahonis; and de white kloodch is daughter of de Grey Wolf."

The Indian spoke truth. Ranleigh was assured of that. All the circumstances of the case drove the conclusion home. And as he stood there, dumb with amazement at the revelation, he heard Lisette talking gaily to the dogs outside.

"Ah, Follette, soon you taste the whip; and you, Ah-teg, you are too impatient. Ai! Ya! you would mush, but you must wait. And you, Wolf Fang, soon you must run like a white man's dog——"

A little burst of laughter came on the heels of the words, and he heard the dogs whine their affection. For a moment he remained like a man frozen into immobility, an inscrutable look upon his face, and behind the mask his brain worked quickly. So this was the secret. Lisette's father was the mysterious man who ruled the Indians of the lakes, and now, the man having already interviewed him, she had come to take him to this renegade white. Swift questions shot through his mind, questions that had been there before and to which he had vainly sought an answer. Why was this man living as an exile from his kind, when all the time there was gold to his hand that would win him entrance to almost any society in the world? What had he done that he should choose this bleak country and the company of the wild Nahonis rather than the amenities of the South land and association with the white race to which he belonged? He recalled what the Grey Wolf had said about coveting gold in his youth and how his exile here was the result of that, and remembering the sombre look he had seen on the man's face, Ranleigh wondered if some



crime that had outlawed him was the explanation of all the mystery. If so——

He got no further. Lisette's voice humming a chanson of the river-drivers came through the open door :

“What is there like the cry of the bird  
That sings in its nest in the lilac-tree ?  
A voice the sweetest you ever have heard,  
It is there, it is there, *ci-ci* !  
It is there, it is here, it must roam and roam  
And wander——”

The song broke off as she crossed the threshold, her dark eyes shining, her face radiant, a gay smile about her lips.

“If you are ready, Roy——”

At the sight of her all his questions vanished like smoke in the wind. His love surged in flood. What matter who her father was, or what he had done to exile him to this wild zone of the Arctic ? The girl was her beautiful self, and her he loved, for her beauty, her courage, her radiant spirit. He dismissed everything else from his mind, and answered her gaily.

“In three minutes I shall be in marching trim, dear girl !”

Lisette laughed and resumed the humming of her song.

“It is there, it is here, it must roam and roam,  
And wander from shore to shore,  
Till I go forth and bring it home,  
And enter and close my door——  
Row along, row along, home, *ci-ci* !”

“Not much rowing just now, Lisette,” he commented laughingly as he took up his rifle and a little pack that he had made, and carried them out to the sled.

“No, mon cher Roy,” she laughed back ; “just now it is ‘Mush along, mush along home, *ci-ci* !’”

He fastened his pack on the sled, thrust his rifle under the lashing ; and then Lisette laughed, cracked her whip, and cried to the leading dog :

“Mush ! Ah-teg ! Mush ! Mush !”

The leader gave a little yelp, all the dogs in the team set their necks to the collars, and the sled began to move. As it reached the sloping bank of the lake the girl threw her weight on the bar to hold it back and keep it from overrunning the team. Then as they struck the level surface of the lake, she swung them to the trail she had made in coming, and as they settled into their pace she looked at her lover and laughed with gladness.

“Now we are really off.”

The team, homeward bound, made a rattling pace, and as the girl was a better traveller than he was, Ranleigh had all his work to keep up with her. Speech he found was impossible, but with the declining sun behind them it was possible for him to feast his eyes upon that lissom figure, now running ahead of the dogs, now hanging on to the sled behind which he toiled. He cared nothing then for that sombre-visaged man who had asserted his right to rule in this wild land. What matter what evil had driven him from his kind, this radiant girl was untouched by it ; and in this case, at any rate, the sin of the father should not be visited upon the child. As his wife she would be beyond reproach ; and in England none would know of the man who, a renegade from his race, ruled over an alien people. He was no prig, and he took no virtue to himself for this decision. He loved the girl who, delicate as the flowers that bloom in the Northland spring and for a brief time clothe the land with beauty, was yet strong as steel and untiring in the wilderness trail.

    Mile by mile they swept on. Soon they reached

the northern shore of the lake, and passed on to the frozen bosom of a narrow river which apparently emptied itself in the land-locked water. At first gloomy spruce-clad hills rose on either side of the river, but presently the country opened out a little, then closed again, and soon the trail ran between high ramparts of rock that shut out the sun and fostered a gloom that made Ranleigh think of the wild Cañon through which but a few weeks before the girl had piloted the boat with such skill. And she was still the pilot leading him—whither? He cared not, he told himself as he raced. It was enough that he was with her, running by her side, her accepted lover; soon, he hoped, to be her mate.

He began to tire, for the pace was tremendous. The girl noticed that he was flagging a little, and cried out to him:

“Take a ride! The dogs can——”

But pride came to his aid. Whilst she could keep the trail without resting, he must. Nothing of her respect would he lose through weakness of the flesh.

“No!” he answered with a laugh. “You first, then perhaps I may!”

“But I am not tired,” she laughed back.

“Nor I,” he answered, and forced his flagging limbs to keep the pace.

Perhaps Lisette understood, but she said nothing, and for a time ran on; then suddenly, as if weakening, she leaped upon the sled and rode for perhaps a mile. Her weight upon the sled made little difference to the pace; and with his mouth firm set, every nerve at the stretch, and every muscle straining, Ranleigh kept himself level, and once she looked up at him with radiant approval in her eyes. At the end of the mile she leaped from the sled, laughed in his face, and cried: “And now, proud man——”

She had understood after all. Her gay taunt proved that, but he cared nothing that she knew. He had proved that he could keep pace, and that was a sufficient sop to his self-pride. He took her place on the sled, gasping a little. After a time his breath came back, and when the cold air began to strike through his furs and chill his sweating body, he took the trail again, clinging to the bar of the sled and running to win back the vanishing warmth. Never had he and Purnell attempted such a pace as this, and he himself had never dreamed it possible. Yet hour by hour, with brief rests upon the sled Lisette kept it up; and calling on all his reserve of strength, he equalled her achievement, thinking to himself that never was such a trail of love since the world began.

They were among high hills again and the daylight was fading fast, when the girl, who was leading, turned the team into the bank, and halted it at the edge of a wood where a small dead spruce lifted ghostly arms.

"We will take a little rest," she said. "Make a fire and boil tea and eat. We have yet far to go."

Roy Ranleigh wiped the sweat from his face, took the axe and attacked the dead spruce. As it fell he looked round. Lisette was kneeling by the dogs, and the paw of one of them was at her mouth. He knew that she was chewing the ice from between its toes; and as he saw her he visioned Edith van Corlow, and the disgust that her face would show at such a spectacle. Then he laughed silently to himself, and a tender light came in his eyes. Lisette was the true mate-woman, fit to stand by a man in all the emergencies of life's trail; to play her part, his equal on all occasions, with an eye for the needs of the hour, and beside her the other woman was a mere figure of porcelain.

In a few minutes he had the fire going; and whilst

the pan of snow-water was boiling, Lisette fed the dogs with little pieces of salmon-roe, containing more nourishment than fish itself. Then they drank pints of scalding tea, black and sweet, thawed out and ate moose-meat and beans already cooked ; and an hour after were on their way again.

It was now night, and overhead the stars gleamed frostily on a frozen world. There was no wind, and nothing but the moving team, the drone of the sled runners, and the creaking of the snowshoes broke the immense stillness of the Arctic night. They slipped like shadows through the shadows of a ghostly world. Ranleigh could not see the country through which they passed ; but he had an impression of high hills thrusting themselves towards the star-strewn dome of heaven, of dark woods running down to the river-bank and closing in on either hand ; and once in a break in the hills he had a view of a valley branching from the trail, dim and grey in the starlight and its mantle of snow, and leading he knew not where.

An hour passed, two hours, three. The dogs began to flag a little, and once or twice Lisette used the whip.

"Ai ! Ya ! Follette, you lazy dog !"

Except for the times when she spoke to encourage or admonish the dogs the girl was dumb, and now Ranleigh felt that he himself had no strength to waste on speech. The long trail was telling upon him heavily, and he was beginning to wonder if he could last out to the end or whether he would have to make the finish riding ignominiously upon the sled ; when Ah-teg, the leading dog, gave a sudden sharp whine which was repeated by his companions. The girl cried to them encouragingly, and the pace accelerated. Then Lisette glanced back over her shoulder.

"Soon we arrive !" she cried.

Ranleigh had guessed from the quickening of the dogs' pace that they were on the home-stretch ; but he was glad to have the girl's assurance of the fact, and braced himself in one last effort to keep the new pace. Suddenly overhead came the first faint glow of the aurora. Then northward, gleamed ribbon after ribbon of green fire, the ribbons furling and unfurling themselves like living things, with torn edges of many hues. The ribbons multiplied, glowed and faded, and with their fading came one bright belt of light that arched itself right across the northern waste. The arch glowed with a radiance that made the wilderness visible, and threw the shadow of the sled and dogs black upon the white snow. In the very midst of the display Ranleigh caught the odour of burning wood, and looking ahead saw what seemed a host of tepees lifting themselves from the river-bank, and flanked by dark woods. A twist in the trail gave him a view of a big fire burning to the left of the encampment ; and by this was outlined a long cabin of logs, standing a little apart from the tepees, the snow crystals glittering on its roof under the light of the aurora. The girl waved her whip and pointed.

" Home ! " she cried.

Then she cracked her whip. " Ai ! Ya ! " she cried to the dogs. " Gee ! Gee ! "

The animals yelped joyously as, making the spurt, they swept up the bank and took the hard-packed snow of the big camp. A score of dogs gave tongue, and one or two ran threateningly towards the racing team. The girl beat them off with her long whip-lash, cutting them as neatly as an expert coach-driver does his team, and the dogs raced on until they reached the log cabin, where panting and whining they came to a halt. Ranleigh, almost gasping for breath, heard the girl laugh, then the door of the cabin was flung

open, and against the clear light behind he saw, like a big black shadow, the form of a tall man. The latter stepped into the open.

"Lisette, my dear child——"

Ranleigh did not hear the rest of the words. He recognized the voice instantly, and knew now beyond all question that Canim had been right. Though he had not questioned the fact since the Indian had revealed it, he was yet in something of a whirl at the proof afforded, and stood there dumb until Lisette laughingly cried:

"Roy, let me introduce you to my father."

"Sir Roy needs no introduction," said the big man, turning and holding out his hand. "We have met before."

Amazed that the man should know his rank, in silence the baronet took the proffered hand, and with the light from the cabin streaming upon it, looked into the face of the Grey Wolf, whose eyes were regarding him whimsically as if he were amused at his visitor's dumb amazement.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A WELL-TIMED INTERVENTION

**F**OR a moment after the woman had gripped his hand Purnell was silent, his mind working at express speed, then he asked: "How far away is Slackman?"

"Five hundred yards—more or less."

"Then we have time to talk. Listen carefully, Miss Stefanson. When he comes you must pretend to have no knowledge of my identity. To you I am just a snowblind man lost in this wilderness. Slackman is bound to recognize me—that is inevitable. Till then you know nothing of me; but when he does

identify me, you must assume an attitude utterly hostile to me. That will mislead him and the men who are with him, and will make it possible to help me if the opportunity is given. You can demand my death if you like, for these fellows are not in the least likely to proceed to an extreme measure of that kind until they have learned from me the whereabouts of the gold, for the secret of which your brother was murdered. It can't be very far to the cabin where my friend is, and if I can't get away by your help it will be possible for you to journey there and to warn him of what has happened, so that he can take steps to rescue me——"

"But the cabin, where——"

"Straight up the valley. Following in the northerly direction you will come to a lake, and on the eastern shore, half-way up, you will see the cabin. The gold is close beside it."

"I will find it," said the woman. "I will save you from these wicked men."

"If I don't return by nightfall, my friend and the Indian who is with us will probably set out to look for me. You must be on the look-out for them, lest they also should fall into Slackman's hands. How many men did you say Slackman had with him?"

"Three!"

"That gives him the pull, and the fact that when he sees me he will be aware of our presence in the neighbourhood will give him a further advantage, since my friend will be in utter ignorance of any danger from that particular quarter. I shall have to do some tall lying, I fancy; but there's nothing else for it. I must keep those fellows away from the cabin, somehow, until Ranleigh is warned. He——"

"S-s-s-s-h-h! Slackman approaches. He may hear you!"



Purnell fell silent, and stood listening to the crunching of the snow and the clack of the snowshoes that announced the approach of the man from whom he might expect little mercy. Aware of the danger in which he stood, and blindly helpless, he was still utterly cool; and as he waited the sound of Slackman's voice reached him:

"If et should happen ter be one of those guys our luck's in!"

"Yes," answered a more cultured voice, "but if it happens to be some one else on the same trail, it's a trifle out. One man in a wilderness like this implies others."

"Don't matter ef there's an army corps!" laughed Slackman brutally. "Ef I hev ter pick 'em off one by one I mean ter hev that gold."

"Well, I'm not averse myself. Up here small scruples are frozen dead!"

The speaker laughed, quite close at hand, and Purnell heard the woman catch her breath; then Slackman's voice broke out coarsely jocular: "Who's ther gent, Miss Stefanson? Better give us an introduction in form!"

"I don't know! He is lost; snow-blind and——"

"God in heaven!" Slackman broke in, his voice expressive of extreme amazement.

"What is it?" asked the woman quickly, in well-simulated surprise. "What is the matter that you should speak like that? This gentleman——"

Slackman's exultant laughter broke on her words, then he cried: "Matter? There's nothin' ther matter, Miss Stefanson. Things is jest right. Thet gent thet yer was holdin' by ther hand so affectionately jest now es ther man what killed yer brother down on ther Dyea trail—murdered him for his gold, which I calculate must be somewhere near at hand."

"What is that you say?" cried the woman in a voice that was almost terrible in its menace. "This blind man is Purnell, who killed Sverdrup?"

"He most surely es!"

"Then you will tell him who I am, before I kill him. Quick!"

For the second time in a few minutes Purnell caught the sound of a pistol cocked, and though he could not see, he knew that the woman must be acting marvellously. At any rate, her hostile attitude called forth the intervention of Slackman.

"Steady on, young woman. There's no hurry about ther killing. Thet guy's got ter tell us where ther gold is first, then we'll hang him in due form; or yer can shoot him as yer like, I don't care a rap which, but till then——"

"No! No! This very moment shall he die. I——"

"But why should I die?" interjected Purnell, rising to his part. "Who are you that would shoot a helpless man without——"

"I," cried the woman. "I am Hilda Stefanson, whose brother you murdered; and now I shall do justice to you. This very minute——"

"Stop her, Charley, for God's sake!" cried Slackman. "She's going to shoot before——"

There was the sound of a rush in the snow, a cry of expostulation from the woman, and the crack of a pistol shot. Purnell heard the bullet whistle above his head, and in spite of his evil case could have laughed aloud at the very real way in which the woman was acting. For a moment or two there was a sound of struggle, the woman shrieking and the men swearing, then Slackman's voice asked pantingly: "Got et, Charley?"

"Yes!"

"Then hang on to et. Ther she-cat ain't ter be trusted with no gun jest now!" Then his voice admonished the woman:

"Look here, young woman, this won't do! Ye're welcome ter shoot thes guy when you get ther word, but not one tick before. I ain't come inter this blame God-forsaken wilderness jest ter see yer do a little fancy shooting. There's a hill of gold we got ter find before yer turn that blind fool into a target. Don't yer go a-forgettin' that like yer did jest now! When we got et yer can do jest what yer like with ther guy—empty yer gun inter him or skin him alive for me; but till then yer will jest keep yer hands off him! Understand?"

"But," cried the woman, "he——"

"There's no buts about et!" broke in Slackman masterfully. "My word goes! Yer keep yer fingers off him till I've done with him, or I tie you up. Got thet?"

"But you promise that he shall not go free? You promise that my brother shall be avenged?"

"I've told yer thet yer can do ther sheriff act all on yer lonesome, ef et suits yer!"

"Then," said the woman menacingly, "I will wait. Give me the pistol."

"I dunno about that," said Slackman doubtfully.

"Have no fear," was the reply. "I was mad just now, but I also want my share of the gold. The pistol I must have that I may guard this slayer of my brother. If he should try to escape I shall perhaps need it to——"

"Oh, we'll watch thet," interrupted Slackman. "Twice ther guy has diddled me; but I reckon he won't be slick enough ter do et three times."

"But I also shall guard him! So give me the pistol."

"If we do, yer won't play no tricks, young woman?" answered Slackman, a yielding note in his voice.

"Have I not promised that I will wait? Before, I was mad; now I am calm. I also, as I said, would find the gold for which my brother died——"

"All right! Chuck it to her, Charley. I reckon she's safe now."

Purnell heard Hilda Stefanson say "thank you," and repressed a sudden inclination to laugh as he thought how completely she had deceived his captors; then a rough hand gripped his arm, another seized his pistol and slid the sheath-knife from his belt, and a second later Slackman gave his orders.

"Now I guess we'll march back ter camp. There's no fear of thes guy runnin' away just now. Thet's ther beauty of a blind man, he can't do no sprintin' for fear of what he may butt inter. Come along, George Washington—an' lift them tootsies ef yer don't want ter go kissin' ther snow."

As the hand upon his arm propelled him forward, Purnell moved on obediently. His case, as he knew, was a pretty desperate one; but it was less desperate than it had been half an hour ago when, lost in the snowy waste, he had been in imminent danger of perishing from hunger and the bitter cold. Slackman was not likely to show him much consideration, but until the secret of the gold was revealed extreme measures were not likely; and with the woman on his side to warn his friends or to assist him to escape, many things were possible. As he marched he found himself wondering what Hilda Stefanson was like. That she was young, Slackman's form of address had revealed; that she was capable and resolute in an emergency, her acting in a difficult moment bore testimony; and the fact that she had made the journey over the ice, and followed the long trail to the

Porcupine, proved that she was no weakling. He tried to make a mental picture of her ; failed to do so satisfactorily ; and, desisting, fell to devising a story that would serve him when they should reach the camp they were making for, when Slackman no doubt would begin to question him.

Walking in darkness, it was impossible for him to judge the distance they travelled, or even to make any sure estimate of the flight of time ; but he judged that he had been walking something like half an hour when suddenly Slackman's voice at his ear shouted a hail that told him they were approaching the camp.

"Boys ! Boys !"

Some one shouted back, and presently whilst they still advanced a new voice asked : "Who hev yer got there, Slacky ?"

"Purnell !"

"Purnell ! The devil ! Then we've pulled the business off ?"

"As good as !" answered Slackman with a laugh.

"We've only got ter make ther blighter talk——"

"Oh ! we're the boys ter do that," laughed the new-comer coarsely. "I've bin through a course of third degree myself, an' I reckon I can teach Purnell the way ter talk. Where did you pick up the guy ?"

"The girl found him wanderin' round, snow-blind. Came near shootin' him when she found who he was, an' Charley an' me jest stopped her in time."

"Good thing too !" laughed the man. "Tain't time ter kill the goose till the golden eggs is laid !" They moved forward, Purnell caught the odour of burning wood, felt the warm breath of a fire ; and was guided to a place where, as he deduced from a sudden increase of warmth, a blanket had been stretched to throw back the heat of the fire. Then Slackman addressed him roughly.

"Yer can sit down, Purnell. Yer won't be in ther way there, an' after we've had a bite we can talk, an' I reckon yer had better be makin' up yer mind ter make a clean bust of et." He stooped, as Purnell slid on to the rabbit-skin blanket spread over balsam boughs thrown on the snow. "Yer heard ther girl," he whispered; "she's crazy ter kill yer, but I'll give yer ther chance ter make a gettaway, ef yer owns up, smart."

He moved away, leaving the prisoner to his reflections; and Purnell sat there, listening to the bustle of the camp, wondering how long it would be before Ranleigh and the Indian set out to search for him; and wondering further what Hilda Stefanson would be able to do to help him. If only this blindness would pass that he might help himself! How long it would be before that could happen he had no means of knowing, but hoped that in a few hours that desired relief might come to pass. To this end he sat with his eyes closed, carefully excluding all light; and whilst he so sat he heard a step halt near him. That some one was staring down at him, he guessed, and a second later knew who it was.

"Now, Miss Stefanson, don't forget your promise," cried the voice of the man Charley, who had been with Slackman.

"Do not fear," answered the voice of Miss Stefanson just above his head. "I have patience. I do but look upon his hateful face."

The man laughed and passed on, then in a swift whisper Hilda Stefanson spoke again. "You must tell them nothing, you understand? They will kill you when they know where the gold is. I heard them talking among themselves."

"I understand," he whispered back.

He heard her move away, and some time passed with-

out anything happening, then Slackman approached him. "I reckon yer hungry after thet walk, Purnell; an' blind or no blind, yer can find ther way to yer mouth. Here's a plate of bacon and beans an' a spoon. Yer'd better stoke up whilst it's hot."

He was glad enough of the meal, and made a shift to eat it, as well as to drink the mug of steaming coffee which one of his captors handed to him; and whilst he ate, he kept his ears open to the conversation of the men seated at the other side of the fire. It was little that he heard, however. Most of the conversation was in low tones, and it was only occasionally that a voice was raised sufficiently for him to hear. Once he had an idea that there was disagreeing among themselves over some matter, for he caught the voice of the man Charley speaking heatedly:

"As the representative of the partner you took in, I claim the right to speak."

"But ef we offer him an' his partner a share maybe he'll talk easier, an'——"

"Not an ounce—not a single ounce of gold! Those are my orders."

"Oh! yer needn't worry," broke in Slackman's voice, with a laugh. "The girl will see ter this one; an' I reckon we'll manage ther other."

"Well, if you like—on those terms——" said the man Charley in a mollified voice.

The voices grew inaudible again, and though Purnell listened intently without appearing to do so, he heard nothing else clearly. But the words that had reached him made it plain to him that his captors were discussing their method of procedure, and were planning to make him some offer in order to persuade him to reveal the secret they so ardently desired. Having finished his meal, he waited with some curiosity for the proceedings to open, which did not take place

for some little time, the men withdrawing from the immediate neighbourhood of the fire in order to settle things among themselves. He heard them go, and then caught Hilda Stefanson's whisper :

"Mr. Purnell, they go away to talk ; but they will return in a moment. You must not say you have found Sverdrup's gold."

"Have no fear !"

"They will try to make you. There is one there who is more evil than all. He is Slackman's friend, and he will stick at nothing to make you tell."

"Is he the man who talked of the third degree ?"

"That is he. I am more afraid of him than of Slackman. He is like a beast. But they watch ; I must speak no more, or perhaps they will suspect."

She fell silent, and a few minutes passed ; then Purnell caught the crunch of moccasined feet in the snow, and in the same moment Miss Stefanson whispered again :

"Now they come !"

He heard them seat themselves on the other side of the fire ; then the voice of Slackman broke the stillness :

"Say, Purnell, what hev yer done with that partner of yours ?"

The tone was casual enough, but Purnell easily understood that he was trying to find out if Ranleigh was in the immediate neighbourhood, and he answered easily :

"Lost him in the snow !"

"Yer mean he's croaked ?"

"No, not that. Perhaps I ought to say that I lost myself in the snow."

"We know that," said Slackman contemptuously, "seeing as we found yer—an' lucky for yer we did, I reckon. How far away from here was it when you parted company ?"



"I don't know," answered Purnell.

"Better think hard, I guess," growled another voice, which Purnell recognized as that of the advocate of the third degree. "There's ways of makin' you ef you don't."

"I can't tell you. I had been wandering blind for hours when Miss Stefanson found me."

"Couldn't hit your camp nohow, I suppose?" asked the man Charley.

"No!"

"His partner don't matter a curse," interrupted a new voice. "What we wants from him is the place where that hill of gold sticks up. Ask him that."

"You heard, Purnell," said the man Charley. "We want to know where Stefanson's mine lies. We think you've found it, or if you haven't you know the locality, and we are convinced it is not far from here. You won't deny that you came up here looking for it?"

"No, but looking for and finding are two very different things."

"No jaw," broke in Slackman truculently. "We're not standin' any, but we're prepared to deal handsome with yer if yer'll own up."

"Handsome!"

"Thet's the word."

"If you'll explain what you mean——"

"I mean thet yer sit in with us an' divide ther pool, an' thet's what I call real handsome, seeing as yer sits there blind as an owl an' helpless as a kitten. An equal share o' ther pool, thet's the offer."

"When the pool is found, I suppose."

"I guess yer can lay yer finger on et at this very minute——"

"You're wrong there," answered Purnell quietly.  
"And if I could——"

"Yep?"

"I wouldn't, that's all."

"For a moment after this declaration there was an amazed silence, then on the stillness the voice of the third-degree man growled ferociously: "That's all, es it?"

"Yes!"

Purnell caught a sound of movement; but had no inkling what was coming until he received a savage blow in the face which knocked him clean over and half-stunned him. He heard Hilda Stefanson give a shuddering cry, Slackman called out something which he did not catch, and over all he heard the man who had struck him, roaring savagely: "It ain't all by a long chalk! Yer ain't never been manhandled I guess, or yer wouldn't talk so cocksure. There's thet! an' thet! an' thet——" As he spoke he struck and kicked cruelly and remorselessly with a deliberate brutality that was all the more shocking since his victim was utterly helpless, and in his blindness quite unable to avoid the savage kicks and blows. And to what lengths the brute would have gone, if an interruption had not come, can only be guessed. But just as Slackman rose to interfere, and as the man threw back his arm for another smashing blow, an utterly unlooked-for thing occurred. Out of the darkness of the wood behind the camp came the crang-g-g! of a rifle, and Purnell's assailant dropped his fist and ducked as a bullet sang close to his ears. The next moment Slackman shouted:

"In ther wood! Purnell's partner, for a dollar. Out of ther firelight, boys; scatter an' we'll git him sure."

There was a scurry of flying feet, with another shot to hurry their flight; and then Hilda Stefanson leaned over the half-senseless captive.

"Come, Mr. Purnell! Quick, let us also go into the wood, whilst your friend makes his diversion. That way perhaps we may secure your safety. Oh, come quickly; or must I carry you?"

Dazed though he was with the battering he had endured, Purnell almost laughed at the thought of any woman ever carrying him; but he staggered to his feet, swayed, and then Hilda Stefanson caught his arm. "This way," she whispered. "Those men——"

A third shot broke on her words; but this time it seemed to come from the darkness of the open in front of the camp, and was followed by shouts and curses, as the four men broke from the wood again, and ran across the open space where the fire was set. A second later one of them, plainly a little rattled, began to empty his pistol at random in the dark, till stopped by a fourth shot, which knocked the weapon out of his hand. The man roared with pain and rage, and in the midst of the miniature fusillade which was fired by Slackman and his friends shooting wildly at an invisible mark, Purnell and his guide gained the wood.

"This way," whispered the woman eagerly. "If your friend keeps it up, we shall get quite a good start. But you must travel quickly, oh, so quickly! or Slackman will catch us; and then we are no better than dead dogs! Quickly! Oh, quickly!"

Purnell braced himself, managed to get a grip on his reeling senses, and then laughed noiselessly. "I'd like to go back and take a hand in the scrap! If only I could see——"

"No! No!" cried the woman earnestly, "you must not go back. Forward is the word! Now we are in the wood—but we must not linger here. We must get far away from those murderers."

"Make for the northern lake!" said Purnell as he stumbled on.

"There we go! And may God help us!"

And stumblingly they struggled on across the crusted snow, whilst the tumult behind them grew.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE GREY WOLF'S STORY

**F**OLLOWING Lisette and her father into the log cabin, still wondering at the form of his host's address, Ranleigh had another surprise, for the living-room which he entered was a revelation of Northland comfort. The furniture was plainly of wilderness make; but its simplicity was not without a charm of its own: the boarded floor was strewn with bear-skin and wolf-skin rugs; there were hangings of soft-tanned hide; three or four good pictures; a couple of tiers of well-filled book-shelves; in a corner was a 'cello and on a small table near by was a violin with a pile of music; whilst on the centre table, which was laid for a meal, was white napery, with silver and good glass which gleamed brightly under the light of a great swing lamp. Along the walls hung a number of trophies—a huge pair of musk-ox horns, the head of a bull moose with magnificent antlers, a pair of caribou heads, and a head of a white mountain sheep with large curling horns. At one end half-concealed by a skin curtain was a doorway which was flanked by a pair of racks, on the one of which several rifles hung, whilst the other held fishing rods and a couple of landing nets.

At his first glimpse of the place Ranleigh recalled what he had read of the refinements and comforts and state of the old Hudson Bay factors, long before gold-seekers had swarmed into the land; and thought

to himself that those old-timers had a worthy rival in the Grey Wolf. But further than that he did not get at the moment ; for with a laughing excuse Lisette left the room, passing through the doorway that he had observed, which apparently led to the sleeping apartments. Then Grey Wolf spoke :

" You are surprised at my home, I see, Sir Roy."

" Yes," answered Ranleigh frankly. " I was not expecting anything like this up here."

Grey Wolf laughed. " Even exiles like a measure of comfort, and when one has the means he naturally indulges." He walked slowly across the room as he spoke, and halted in front of one of the few pictures. " There is something here that might interest you, I think."

Ranleigh followed him wonderingly, glanced at the picture before which the Grey Wolf had halted, and experienced a shock of surprise. The picture was that of a grey old Tudor mansion, set in a wide park, a typically English scene, and as his eyes fell on it he whistled in surprise. Grey Wolf looked at him smilingly. " You recognize the old place ? "

" Yes," answered Ranleigh quickly. " It is Anthorpe Manor—my home."

" It was mine—once ! "

There was a note of deep sadness in his host's tones as he made the admission, and the younger man turned to him swiftly, amazement on his face.

" It was yours once ! "

" Thirty years ago—before you were born. Up here I am known as the Grey Wolf, and I am content with that ; but in the world where I once moved I was known as Maurice Ranleigh." He looked keenly at his guest as he spoke, but apparently the younger man had not heard the name before, and Grey Wolf

smiled a little sadly. "You have never heard the name——"

"Ranleigh, of course. But the baptismal name, no!"

"I am not surprised," was the reply. "There are things that honourable families prefer to forget; members whom they prefer to cut off from the family tree—like dead wood."

"But, sir——"

"S-s-s-h-h! Lisette comes! After supper we can talk; and I am forgetting my duties as host. After your journey you will like to wash and change your footwear. If you will come——"

At that moment the skin curtain over the doorway at the far end of the room was thrown aside and Lisette re-entered, but such a Lisette as Roy Ranleigh had never seen. She was utterly transformed. The girl whom he had seen kneeling in the water, baling steadily on the rough journey from Skagway to Dyea, who had piloted his boat through the Box Cañon and had ridden it safely on the White Horse's Mane; who that night had raced him almost off his feet, from her silken shoes to the diamond pin in her hair, might have stepped from a Parisian fashion plate. He looked at her in amazement. "Lisette!" he cried wonderingly.

A gleam of laughter came in the girl's dark eyes.

"You are surprised——" she began.

"No!" he broke in promptly. "Entranced is the word!"

The Grey Wolf laughed. "You put us out of countenance, Lisette, my dear. Sir Roy will not pack evening clothes on the trail. You will have to excuse us."

"I shall never forgive you if you keep me waiting for supper," answered the girl gaily. "I am almost famished."

"Come along, Roy," laughed the Grey Wolf, and over his shoulder he answered the girl: "Five minutes—ten at the most, Lisette."

He shepherded the young man through the doorway, and to a small sleeping-chamber, and left him a moment, presently returning with dry socks and moccasins, and whilst Ranleigh was changing his footgear an Indian girl brought an enamelled can of hot water. He washed quickly, his mind busy all the time with the surprise he had experienced, and trying to guess what further surprise awaited him after supper, but in vain; and when he stepped out of the room it was to find the Grey Wolf awaiting him.

"Quick work!" laughed his host, and led him back to the living-room, where Lisette greeted them laughingly.

"Two minutes ahead of time! Wonderful!"

She stepped to a small gong, smote it thrice, and presently an Indian woman appeared, carrying a joint of moose-meat, whilst she was followed by a girl bearing other dishes, which, being uncovered, revealed beans and floury potatoes. At the latter Roy Ranleigh betrayed his surprise.

"My own growing," laughed the Grey Wolf. "I have been experimenting for years, and I have proved that many vegetables can be grown up here, if care is taken."

The joint was followed by some preparation of maize, and that by cheese, and a glass of wine that astonished the guest; then when the table was cleared coffee was served, and at a sign from her father, Lisette withdrew. As she went the young man followed her with his eyes, and scarcely had the curtain fallen behind her, when the Grey Wolf said abruptly: "Sir Roy, is it true, as Lisette tells me, that you wish to become my son-in-law?"

"There is nothing that I desire more," answered Ranleigh fervently. "If you will give your permission, sir——"

The Grey Wolf stopped him by a gesture. "Wait ! There are things that you must know first, things that I must tell you."

He sat considering a moment, whilst the younger man watched him intently, wondering what was coming ; then he began to speak, slowly, hesitatingly, as if he found some difficulty in making the statement which he felt to be necessary.

"You have found many—er—surprises here to-night, I imagine, Sir Roy ? "

"Surprise on surprise," admitted Ranleigh with a short laugh.

"I am now about to give you another," said the Grey Wolf slowly. "You admitted just now that you had never heard my name spoken until I myself told you it, but I am your uncle——"

"Uncle ? " cried Ranleigh in amazement.

"Your father's brother ; his elder brother, to be precise," said the Grey Wolf quietly.

"My father's elder brother ? " Roy Ranleigh started to his feet, and stared at his host in astonishment.

"Yes ! " was the quiet reply.

As he stood there looking at the silvery-haired man before him, not for a moment did Roy Ranleigh question the truth of this amazing statement. He accepted it without reserve, and as he did so a score of inferences flowing from the truth of the statement rushed through his mind.

"Then," he said abruptly, "you are really Sir Maurice Ranleigh, and the owner of Anthorpe Manor ? "

"No ! " was the quiet reply. "I am the Grey Wolf, Chief and Shaman of the Nahoni tribe."



"But—but if you are my dead father's elder brother——"

"I am that, though in a sense I died twenty years before my brother."

Roy Ranleigh looked at his host bewilderedly. "I do not understand. You died twenty years before my father, you say, and yet—and yet——"

"There are other ways of dying than that for which the physician gives his certificate," broke in the other quietly. "There are many men who are still living who are more completely dead to the world in which they once lived than if they had literally died; for there are those who cherish the memory of the latter, whilst the former men make haste to forget, which is proved by the fact that you had never so much as heard my name."

The Grey Wolf spoke in a tone of utmost melancholy, and with his eyes fixed on the other's face, Roy Ranleigh waited without speaking, till he should resume his explanation.

A minute or two passed in complete silence before the Grey Wolf spoke again, and when he did so the note of melancholy was accentuated.

"Oblivion is the best that some men can hope for—and for nearly thirty years I have been one of these men; one of the dead in life, at least so far as the friends and men of my youthful manhood are concerned. Needless to say, I deserved so to die; and I may say that I have courted that oblivion which has been my lot. It is seven-and-twenty years ago since my death was announced in *The Times*, and two years afterwards your father became the master of Anthorpe and the sixth baronet."

"But he had no real right! You were alive——"

"He had every right, so far as he knew. My death was well attested. I saw to that, because though I

was an outcast from my family, I knew what was due to an honourable name, and though I was personally utterly lost I still cherished a remnant of the old pride and a desire to lift the dishonour of my own actions from others ; so I made an expiation for my sin by joining the dead without actually dying, though it is possible that I should have had to expiate my sin by literal death had I not fled from England."

Ranleigh looked at the silvery head bowed melancholily with pity, and asked in a whisper : " It was murder, then ? "

" I am not sure," said the Grey Wolf quietly. " I have never been sure. There was another man involved, but whether he or I was the guilty one I have never known. I fled and he remained, so that the guilt was credited to me ; though I have sometimes thought that the other man may have fired the shot which killed the disreputable heir to a great name."

Again there was silence for a time, a silence that was only broken by the roaring of the great stove ; then once more the Grey Wolf resumed : " I have lived through that night ten thousand times, and still I am in doubt, and this side the grave I can never know the truth ; for the other man to whom the guilt might belong ten years ago achieved a death that was entirely worthy and honourable, a death that endeared him to many who had not known him, and that will win him a place in the history books. . . . I shall not tell you the whole story. There is no need, to-day. But it was a case of cards, and of three young fools who lost their heads. The man who was killed was rich, but he could not endure to lose money, and that night he lost much, and between his losses and drink he grew quarrelsome. Quite suddenly he stood to his feet and accused the other man and myself of cheating—wrongfully, I swear from my soul. As

the charge was made the other man struck him a blow which sent him reeling across the room, and the next instant the accuser had wrenched open a drawer, and had taken from it a revolver. He was mad with rage and there was murder in his eyes. I leaped for him as the pistol cracked, and as we went down there was a struggle, and the room was plunged in darkness. We rolled upon the floor and I heard the third man shouting something, then just as I wrenched the pistol from the madman's hand a table crashed upon us, striking me on the head; and I was still wavering between unconsciousness and consciousness when there was a flash and the second crack of a pistol quite close, and I heard the man under me give a long sigh, and he grew supine; and the same second everything grew suddenly dark to me.

"How long it was before I came out of that darkness I do not know. I imagine it could not have been very long, but when I did it was to see the dead man's valet standing in the doorway with a candle in his hand staring at me white-faced, with horror in his eyes. I looked round. The man's master was lying there quite dead, with a little trickle of blood running from his temple, whilst the pistol lay perhaps a yard away. Except for the white-faced valet we were alone in the room, the third man having fled. I lifted myself upon my elbow, and was just going to speak to him when he anticipated me.

" 'You damnable murderer,' he said in a whisper. 'You've killed——'

"The shock of the charge brought me to my feet, and I suppose the fellow thought I was going to attack him; for he threw the brass candlestick at me, and fled, yelling an alarm as he went.

"I did not wait to see what followed. Two strides carried me to the door, and six to the street. Just as

I reached it I saw the valet running in one direction, and I promptly took the other. The first corner brought a hansom, and six minutes later I was in my rooms, changing for dear life. I was in a panic and did not stop to think. It would perhaps have been better if I had ; possibly I should have waited the issue. As it was, I had the luck to catch a train at King's Cross going North. By dawn I had reached Hull, and two hours later was on my way to Hamburg. There I caught a German steamer going to New York, and from there without delay I made for San Francisco, meaning to go to the Islands and there lose myself.

" But there others took a hand in shaping my fate. I was drugged and shanghaied, and when I was in a fit state to know what had happened, I was running North on a whaler under a most brutal American skipper. To complain would have been a mere waste of breath, and in any case I should not have done so ; for a ship going to the Arctic was about as good a hiding-place as I could expect to find."

He broke off for a moment, lit a pipe, and then resumed : " It was a lively sort of hiding-place, though. As I said, the skipper was a brute and the mates were no better. Before we had passed Point Barrow the crew, a third of whom like myself had been shanghaied, mutinied, and two men were shot, and thrown over-side like dead dogs. That made the feeling among the crew worse, and when at the beginning of the winter we were wrecked on Foggy Island the officers weren't even given a chance—and they didn't deserve one. Only one of the boats got ashore, and I was in that one. There was a camp of Eskimos near by, a kindly lot, who gave us shelter ; and when the rest of the boat's crew started to march overland to one of the whaling stations along the coast, I remained with the blubber-

eaters, built myself an igloo and wintered there, taking great care of the rifle and ammunition which the whalers had left me.

"In the spring, leaving the Eskimo, I started to march southward, and had a very bad time; lost myself in the barrens and was dropping with starvation when I came upon a small herd of musk-ox. I managed to kill one, a cow, and the others, except a calf, fled. The calf remained where it was, nuzzling its dead mother, and I took it along with me; and it became quite tame, and grew amazingly. I spent that winter on a creek that I have since learned emptied itself into the Porcupine, living on straight moose-meat, and through most of the long winter fearful of scurvy. I escaped, however, and as in the winter I'd trapped a good deal of fur, when I met a wandering Indian, who told me of a trading-post at the mouth of the creek, I took my pelts down, using the growing musk-ox for my beast of burden, and traded my pelts for food, clothing and ammunition. From the trader I heard a fancy story of gold having been found farther south, and in the spring I started to find the place. I searched the whole summer, lost myself a second time, and on the first snows of winter rode on my ox into a camp of Indians whose tepees were pitched on the bank of a lake.

"I was very glad to see them, and they were amazed to see me. Riding on my ox, I was a god in their sight; to all except the Shaman, who had a grudge against me from the start. In the end I had to fight him for my life, and as the others played fair, I won. The fellow fled, and I stepped into his shoes and stayed on, and later, when the Chief died, I took the double office and set to work to do the Rajah Brooke business over again up here in the cold North instead of in the hot South. I succeeded passably well, be-

cause I found gold; and keeping the secret of it, opened up communications with the traders, getting in arms and comforts to which the Indians had been strangers, but allowing no fire-water to be brought in, and not permitting white men to settle in the district. As a result of the policy I have followed, my Nahonis have trebled their number in twenty odd years; and living their old life are prosperous and contented; as I myself am in as great a measure as I can ever hope to be, for I like the game, and I like to feel that I have accomplished Esau's redemption."

"Esau's redemption?"

"Yes! Esau lost his birthright, as I lost mine; but carved out for himself a new portion—as I have—by a bitter road. It is my one thing of pride—the pride of a single-handed achievement."

For a moment Roy Ranleigh did not speak, but sat pondering the story in silence, then a little look of trouble came in his eyes.

"And Lisette?" he asked.

"Is my daughter, the child of the wife whom I married in my fourth winter here, and who has been dead these twelve years."

The Grey Wolf waited for the question which he was sure would follow, but it was not asked; and suddenly he rose from his chair, crossed to Roy Ranleigh, and set his strong hand on the young man's shoulder. Then he spoke smilingly: "You will not ask, but I will tell you. Lisette's mother was the daughter of a Frenchman, an independent fur-trader, whose wife came from the Quebec Province; and she is as white as you, boy, or as any other Ranleigh who ever breathed. We were married at Crooked Creek by the famous French priest, Bishop Grouard. Now, my nephew, if I may so call you, you have heard the story; you know all there is to be known. Do you

still want to take Lisette as your wife to the home that should be hers ? ”

As he asked the question his blue eyes searched the young man's face for any sign of shrinking ; and in them there was a lurking fear, an anxiety that he could not hide. But the fear and the anxiety were swept utterly away as the younger man rose to his feet and cried :

“ Before God, yes ! What else ? I love her, and all things else are nothing.”

“ Thank God ! ” whispered the Grey Wolf ; then quite suddenly collapsed in the chair the young man had vacated, and for a time crouched there with his face hidden in his hands, a strong man in the grip of overmastering emotion.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A FLIGHT IN THE NIGHT

WITH Hilda Stefanson guiding him, Purnell stumbled on through the wood. From the darkness behind them came sounds of clamour, shouts of men and the occasional crack of a firearm. Presently, however, the firing ceased and the shouts grew less frequent, and after a little time the silence of the North supervened. Then the woman stopped to listen.

“ Wait ! ” she said in a whisper.

They stood quite still, and as they did so, to the left of them in the wood came a noise like a pistol shot.

“ Ah ! ” she whispered, “ they are there ! ”

“ No,” replied Purnell. “ That was not a shot. It was a tree bursting because its heart is frozen.”

“ You are sure ? ” she asked earnestly. “ You are quite sure ? ”

"Quite sure. I have heard the sound many times lately. There is a difference. I am certain that was a tree."

"Then for the moment we are safe. Let us hurry, my friend."

They moved forward again, and just as they did so voices sounded once more from the camp which they had fled. "I wonder what that means?" whispered Purnell.

"It means that your enemies have returned, and have found that you are not at the camp, I imagine," said the woman quickly. "Let us listen once more. Perhaps we may hear something that will guide us."

They halted anew, and a moment later the woman's anticipation was realized. Down the valley, clearly on the still air, came the sound of a hoarse voice:

"M-i-s-s-s Stefanson-n-n!"

"Ah!" said the woman. "I was right! They have gone back to the camp, and have missed you and me! Come, my friend, we must not let them find us now."

Once more they moved forward, and behind them sounded other voices, shouting the woman's name; but as they journeyed these gradually faded into silence, and presently were lost altogether. Then Miss Stefanson spoke again: "They will find our tracks. They will follow."

"They won't pick them out very easily in the dark," replied Purnell. "There seemed to be rather a lot of running about, and I should say they will have muddled up the trail a goodish bit."

"But sooner or later they must discover it!"

"Yes, that's the worst of snow. It records and reveals so much. But you are forgetting one thing, and that is, that my friends will perhaps pen them up in their camp for a little time."



"You think it was your friend and the Indian who intervened?"

"Who else in this desolate land? I hope nothing has happened to them back there in the darkness."

"It is not very likely," answered Miss Stefanson reassuringly. "Slackman and the others were taken by surprise, and very much bewildered. They fired at random, and probably hit nothing; whilst it is not in the least likely that your friends, with the advantage of darkness, allowed themselves to be caught. Travel in hope, my friend."

Without snowshoes the going was terribly hard, but they pressed forward; and after an hour or so of silence, the woman gave a sharp exclamation:

"Ah!"

"What is it, Miss Stefanson?"

"We have reached the lake!" said the woman.

"And the aurora is glowing overhead. I can see all the surface. There is nothing there!"

"Then move to the right. The cabin is half-way down the lake. You pass a creek running between high hills first, and the cabin is a little way beyond."

Steadfastly they trudged forward, neither speaking, the woman holding first one of Purnell's hands and then the other. Under the mysterious aurora, moving across that waste of snow, to one watching them they must have seemed like a pair of lost children in a ghostly world. Only the crunch of their moccasined feet on the frozen snow broke the immense silence, which silence as they journeyed began to affect the woman's spirit. Once or twice she looked about her fearfully, and once she stopped and looked back, then hurried forward.

"What is it?" asked Purnell in a whisper. "Is Slackman coming?"

"No! Not Slackman, my friend. I see nothing.

And yet I feel as if we were watched ; as if these hills and woods were full of ghostly eyes that followed us."

"I know the feeling," answered Purnell simply. "It is induced by the great silence and the white immensity. Men go mad under it sometimes."

"I do not wonder," said the woman with a quiver in her voice. "It is as if God had forsaken the world. Let us make haste."

Thenceforward they trudged in silence, until they reached the creek that led down to the Porcupine, then Miss Stefanson spoke again :

"We pass the creek of which you spoke !"

"Then soon we shall arrive at the cabin. Look back, Miss Stefanson, and tell me if we are followed."

The woman paused and looked back. "No ! There is no one in sight."

"That is good, for the present. But daylight will bring Slackman and his crowd."

"What matter ? With your friends we shall be able to deal with them."

"Yes, thank Heaven !"

They trudged on ; but a few minutes later Hilda Stefanson halted again quite suddenly, and Purnell asked in alarm :

"What is the matter ? Are those blackguards ahead of us ?"

"No !" said the woman in a shaking voice. "I am looking at a white cross—it is—very lonely."

Purnell did not speak, until the silence was broken by that most desolate of all sounds—a woman's sobbing. He waited a moment, knowing what the woman at his side must be feeling, then he groped for and found her arm.

"Miss Stefanson," he began awkwardly, "please. You will make yourself ill !"

"I can—not help——"

"But if we stand here, heated as we are, we shall freeze. To-morrow——"

He broke off and the woman checked her sobbing and looked quickly at him. "Yes?" she asked quiveringly. "To-morrow?"

"I myself will bring you to Oscar's grave. It will not look so desolate when the sun is on it."

Hilda Stefanson made no reply, but with his hand still resting on her arm moved forward, and a few minutes later she spoke again:

"We have arrived. The cabin is before us; but there is no light showing."

"Then Ranleigh and Canim have not yet returned," said Purnell, adding with quick anxiety: "I hope nothing has happened to them. If those blackguards——"

"Have no fear!" broke in the woman. "God is against wrong this night, or He would not have brought us here. Let us go in."

They moved to the cabin. The woman found the latch-string, opened the door, and they passed inside. There was no one within, and except for a dying glow in the stove the place was in darkness. As Hilda Stefanson closed the door, Purnell on a sudden impulse slid his hands from the great fur mitts, groped for and found the woman's arms.

"Miss Stefanson," he began stammeringly, as he gripped them, "you have saved my life. I shall be grateful to you until my dying day."

"Oh," was the reply in a voice that shook a little, "the gratitude is not all on your side. Your blind coming delivered me from Slackman and those others. We are what you men call quits!"

"No! Nor ever shall be! If I could see you——"

"My friend, in this darkness that would be quite

impossible even if you had the use of your eyes," said the woman with tremulous laughter. "If you will tell me where I may find the means to make a light——" Purnell released her, and groped in his clothes until he found a tin box of matches, which he thrust into her hands.

"Here are matches. There is a candle on the shelf at the right of the cabin, or it may be on the table."

The woman took the matches, struck one, found the candle and lit it, then she stood for a moment with it in her hand, looking straight into Purnell's blind eyes, a little smile of tenderness playing about the corners of her mouth. She did not speak; she simply looked at him with eyes that were full of a soft light, and suddenly Purnell spoke.

"You are looking at me, Miss Stefanson. I can feel that you are. I hope there is nothing the matter?"

"Nothing, my friend. I am thinking that for many weeks I have been praying that I might meet you, and that this afternoon I would have killed you, and now——and now——"

"And now?" he asked as she broke off.

"Oh!" she cried with a tremulous laugh. "Now we are most dear friends, who have known each other for at least a thousand years! . . . But I must attend to the stove, make coffee and prepare food against your friends' return, if you will be seated, my friend, out of the way. Come, I will guide you." She took his hand and led him to one of the improvised chairs. And as he seated himself he still kept her now unmittened hand in his. Hilda Stefanson waited, a little wonderingly, with the smile again playing about her mouth. Then quite suddenly Purnell lifted the hand to his lips, and kissed it.

"Thank you!" he said, and released her.

Hilda Stefanson said nothing in reply, but began to busy herself about the cabin. He heard her filling up the stove, caught the roar of the wood as it began to blaze, then the sound of the axe as she crushed ice for the kettle, and all the various noises incidental to the preparation of a meal, and through all, in the darkness that surrounded him, he strove to picture what she was like. That she was tall, he was sure, at least as tall as himself ; and that she was of generous build his grasp of her arms had convinced him. Recalling Sverdrup Stefanson's blue eyes and fair hair, it was not difficult to guess that she also had these same light blue eyes and golden hair of Northern Europe ; and now he imagined her beautiful with the blonde beauty of the Northern races, and the eyes of his mind pictured her goddess-like, in face and figure like one of those feminine deities of the Norsemen whom he had seen portrayed in artistic editions of the sagas in far New York.

His heart rejoiced at the picture conjured up. Gratitude, according to the trite saying, is akin to love ; and he was profoundly grateful to this woman who, as he was convinced, had saved him from torture and from death, and already, though he had not seen her, he was more than half in love with her. He listened to her movements as a waiting lover does for the footsteps of his mistress ; and once, when in a rich contralto voice she broke into a catch of song, he smiled, and tapped the melody out with his foot. Then he heard her go outside, and it seemed a very long time before she returned. He waited, and the minutes passed with leaden feet. Suppose something had happened to her ; suppose—— He was rising from his chair, the prey to gathering fears, when he heard her hand fumbling for the latch-string, and as she entered he sank back with a sigh of relief.

"You have been quite a long time," he said as she closed the door behind her.

"Yes! I went to look on the lake for your friends. As yet they do not appear, but no doubt they will be along presently."

"I hope so," he said, with new anxieties gripping him. "I hope nothing has happened to them. If those scoundrels have got them it will be awkward."

"If they have, we must get them back when your eyesight returns."

"Those blackguards may be up here before then," he said; "they can't miss finding our trail if they really look for it. Better drop the bar across the door, I think. It is as well to take precautions."

Hilda Stefanson followed his suggestion, then she made coffee; and as neither of them was hungry she filled him a pipe, and they began to talk, whilst they awaited the coming of Ranleigh and the Indian.

"How did Slackman find our trail out of Dawson?" asked Purnell after a little time.

"There was a friend of his set on the trail to watch by another man; and since only two sleds went down the trail in two days, and you were not to be found in Dawson, they guessed that they were yours."

"By another man, you say? I don't understand. Were there others besides Slackman after me?"

"Not after you, but after your friend."

"After Ranleigh! Who on earth could that be?"

"He is a big man up here, one of the kings of the North. His name is Cornelius van Corlow——"

"Van Corlow! Phew!"

"You know him? You know why he should follow your friend?"

"I know of him! I can make a dim guess why he should be down on Ranleigh. But how did Slackman get in touch with van Corlow?"

"I do not understand all. But as I said, van Corlow had set men to watch the trail. Perhaps some one had told him of Sverdrup's gold; I do not know. One of the men set to watch was, as I told you, Slackman's friend, and before this man went to his employer to report, he told Slackman of his suspicions. Slackman, who had lost much money at the tables, and had not the means to outfit himself for a long trail, went to van Corlow, told him of me and of Sverdrup's gold, and offered to trail you on shares, swearing that you and your friend were responsible for my brother's death, and that you were not worthy to live. What else he said is not known to me, but van Corlow fell in with his plan, and we started within twenty-four hours; the man Charley, who is Corlow's tool, accompanied us."

"But—I am glad they did so—why did they bring you?"

"Because I would not be left behind, for one thing; and for another, because I might be supposed to have some claim on my brother's gold. They hoped to use me in that way and—and another." Purnell remembered the click of the pistol which he had heard when he had first told her his name, and he did not ask what the last was. In his mind he knew, and he smiled as he thought of the change in her attitude towards him. For a little time they sat in silence, then abruptly the woman rose, and going to the door opened it and slipped outside. A moment later she was back again. She closed the door sharply, dropped the bar with a sound that betokened haste, and a second later Purnell heard the safety-catch of a rifle shot back and the click of a breech-bolt as a shell was slid into its chamber.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

"I am just loading the rifle which hangs on the rack in the cabin here."

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because there is a dog-team coming up the lake. It is quite close, and it is well to be prepared."

"Ranleigh and the Indian returning, I expect," said Purnell cheerfully. "No need for worry, Miss Stefanson."

"You may be right, I do not know. It is well to be ready. Looking forth, I could see only one man."

"Only one! Phew! That sounds bad. I hope nothing has happened to Ranleigh or Canim."

"We shall know in a moment or two, Mr. Purnell. As I said, the team is quite close."

They waited in silence, and Purnell visioned the woman standing in the glow of the fire, rifle in hand, with set face, alert and listening; and though he was blind and helpless he was without fear, for the last few hours had developed in him a deep conviction of Hilda Stefanson's nerve and capability. He himself remained silent, listening, and then as he caught the cheerful yelp of homing-dogs he smiled.

"You can put down that rifle, Miss Stefanson. It's Ranleigh or the Indian, or both."

He heard the rifle-stock grounded at his word, then amid the chorus of yelping dogs caught the sound of the Indian's voice.

"Canim!" he exclaimed sharply. "In God's name, open the door and ask what has happened to Ranleigh, Miss Stefanson."

The woman went to the door, dropped the bar and stepped outside, and he heard her ask the question and then caught the Indian's reply:

"Him not with me! Him go away up de lake dis mornin'. Him not come back two, drie dey."

Purnell was still mystified by Ranleigh's absence, but he drew a breath of relief. His friend had not been in that affray down the lake, and wherever else he was he had not fallen into Slackman's hands. He



heard the woman ask one or two more questions, to which the Indian made only short replies ; then she re-entered the cabin.

" Your friend is not with the Indian. As I gather, some one came for him this morning and he went away after you had left the cabin."

" Yes ! I heard. We shall know more when Canim comes in, though like all Indians he is no great talker."

They waited until the Indian entered, then impatiently Purnell asked his question :

" Where is Mr. Ranleigh, Canim ? "

The Indian did not immediately reply, but waited until he had dropped the bar of the door, which act struck both the other two as a trifle ominous.

" Why do you do that, Canim ? " asked the woman quickly.

" Because dose bad men you leav' down dere, dey come soon ! "

" Ah ! are they following you, Canim ? "

" Dey see me goin' after you break away, and dey sure to come."

" It was you alone then who broke in on their little game ? "

" Yes, I wait long time . . . wait till dark an' you not come back, den I take de dogs an' look for you. I follow easy, an' after a time I see you wander like a blind man——"

" The glare of the sun got me ; I went snow-blind."

" I guess dat, an' I follow till I find where you meet another——"

" That was I," broke in Hilda Stefanson.

" Still I follow till I see a camp, den I leav' de dogs an' creep forward, an' see dat bad man's beatin' you, when I shoot. Den I see de klootch run into de wood with you an' I tink she bring you here ; an' I work on de oder side of dat camp, an' when dose men come

back an' hunt for you I let dem see me, den I lead dem away from you an' de klootch, an' after a time I find de dogs an' return. But dose men dey will come soon."

"I expect they will. We must get ready for them. You have done very well, Canim, and there are many sticks of tobacco for reward. But who was it who came here this morning for Ranleigh?"

"De daughter of de Grey Wolf. Mr. Ranleigh him leave message dat him will return perhaps in two days, perhaps in dree."

"The sooner the better if those fellows are coming along," said Purnell quietly. "I'm blind as a bat, Canim. If those scoundrels show up, you and Miss Stefanson will have your work cut out to keep them off."

The Indian's only reply was a grunt, and a moment later Purnell heard him rummaging among the tools which they had brought with them, then he caught the sound of steel against wood.

"What is he doing?" he asked, addressing the woman.

"He's digging at the cabin wall with a pick," said Miss Stefanson, then she exclaimed quickly: "The cabin is loopholed. He is just getting out the plugs. It would seem as if we are to fight; most of the advantage will be with us."

"There's the window," said Purnell. "That's a very vulnerable point."

"Have no fear," replied Miss Stefanson; "that shall be made safe."

He heard her moving about, piling things under the window, then she called for the Indian's help, and presently she announced: "The window is quite safe now. There are two bags of flour in front of it. No bullet will drive through both."

"Better get the dogs in—we don't want to lose them—also a store of ice and wood. If those rascals really mean business we may not be able to get outside for a day or two. In any case, it is well to be prepared."

"True!"

When the loopholes had been cleared the Indian helped the woman, and together they laboured for a full hour, at the end of which time Canim gave a grunt of satisfaction and approached the stove, whilst Hilda Stefanson threw herself down upon one of the sledges which had been brought indoors for safety.

"Nothing to do but wait now," she announced. "I do hope that if Slackman is coming he will be quick. To wait long will fret my nerves to pieces."

Purnell smiled. He did not believe that of Hilda Stefanson after his experiences with her, and he answered cheerfully: "Better try and sleep, Miss Stefanson, before the ball opens."

"Sleep!" she cried with a light laugh. "Sleep, my friend. How can I sleep when I want to shoot?"

At that Purnell laughed outright, but as events followed, weary of waiting, both Hilda Stefanson and himself were sound asleep when the crash of the door awakened them. The grey light of dawn was creeping through the loopholes, and as the woman saw the Indian pick up a rifle, she cried: "What is it? Are they here?"

"Dey hav' follow de trail. Dey are out on de lac, very near!"

And with that Purnell himself opened his eyes, found that dimly he could see the glow of the stove, and quickly closed them again as the sudden pain struck through them. And in the same moment a voice sounded from the lake below:

"Hallo, there! Hallo, Purnell!"

## CHAPTER XIX

## IN THE CABIN

AS the voice sounded through the still air Hilda Stefanson looked quickly towards Purnell, who sat with his eyes closed, listening for any further hail.

"That is Slackman," she said. "It is no use attempting to parley with him. He will stoop to any treachery, and to go out to him would be folly."

"I agree," he answered quietly.

"Then the sooner he knows that we do not mean to talk with him the better. It will keep him from approaching too close."

"What are you going to do?" he asked curiously.

"Surprise him," she answered with a little laugh of excitement.

He caught a sound of movement, which was followed by other sounds that he could not interpret, and though he turned in her direction and for one brief moment opened his eyes, he could see nothing beyond a vague shadow. He waited, and just as another hail came from the lake he caught a click and the cabin was filled with shattering sound. A roar of anger sounded outside, a dog yelped and howled, and on the heels of the clamour sounded a hard little laugh.

"A dog!" said the woman. "It ought to have been Slackman. But it has scared them. Ah!"

The crack of rifles sounded outside, and was followed by dull thuds as the bullets plugged the cabin walls. Instantly the woman replied, and laughed once more as she announced the result.

"They've withdrawn out of sight and out of range. They have gone round the corner of the bluff on the right."

For a time nothing happened, and there was a great silence. Purnell listened intently, but no sound reached him; then abruptly Hilda Stefanson spoke:

"Oh, I wish they would do something. This inactivity is terribly trying."

"I guess they're trying to think out some way of getting at us without hurt to themselves," replied Purnell. "But it won't be easy. Your brothers selected the site of the cabin very well. Whoever tries to attack it will have to show himself in the open. For the present, at any rate, the game is with us. All we have to do is to wait. How I wish I could see!"

"How are your eyes this morning?" asked the woman solicitously.

"Better, I think. They are not quite so painful, and just now when I opened them I could see the glow of the stove."

"It would be better for you if they were bandaged, wouldn't it?"

"I dare say. If they were I shouldn't interrupt the process of convalescence by trying to see things."

"Then—wait!"

A moment or two passed, and he heard her tell the Indian to keep a look-out; then he felt her breath upon his hair, some soft material was thrown over his eyes, and he was conscious of the touch of her hands as she knotted the bandage. A moment later the hands rested on his shoulders.

"You must keep still and not worry! Canim and I can keep those men at bay until your friend returns, and he may afford an element of surprise, and help us to defeat Slackman."

"But, on the other hand, he may walk right into their hands."

"Not if we fire from time to time. The air is so

still outside that he is bound to hear, and that will make him watchful."

"Something in that," he agreed. "If he hears repeated firing he will guess that there is something wrong, and——"

A sudden roar of excitement sounded outside, and the girl hurried to one of the loopholes. "What is it, Canim?"

"Noding," answered the Indian stolidly. "I see noding."

The woman moved quickly from one loophole to another. All approaches to the cabin were absolutely blank, and there was nothing to be seen except the snow, a section of the lake, and the lower branches and trunks of the wood behind. But the clamour continued, shouts and excited laughter, and then like a flash the meaning of the clamour leaped into Purnell's mind.

"They have found the gold," he said. "It runs across the cliff face just round the corner there. It will keep them engaged for a time, and they won't trouble us for a little while, I guess."

"Then we may as well breakfast," answered Miss Stefanson coolly, and giving Canim instructions to watch she began to prepare the meal.

For a time the noise round the bluff went on, and though after a while it grew less pronounced, it continued all through the brief time occupied by the preparation and consuming of the meal; then silence fell, and, strain his ears as he might, Purnell could hear nothing.

"I wonder what they are doing now?" asked Miss Stefanson a little anxiously.

"Make fire—eat!" said Canim laconically.

"I guess you're dead right, Canim! If I only had my eyes, we might creep out and surprise them."

"No!" replied the Indian. "Stop in cabin. Dey not get in."

A full hour passed without anything happening, and the Indian and Miss Stefanson watched the approaches to the cabin without seeing anything at all of Slackman and his party; then most unexpectedly there was the thud of a bullet at the side of the cabin, followed by the crack of the rifle that had fired it.

"Ugh!" said Canim.

"Where did that come from?" asked Purnell quickly.

"I don't know," replied the woman. "There is no one in sight, but from the sound it was some little distance away."

"There must be some place that commands the cabin," said Purnell, "and they are shooting at the walls in the hope of getting us without being seen. Well—— Ah, there again!"

"It was the window that time," whispered Miss Stefanson. "I heard the parchment yield." A little laugh broke from her. "They'll spoil the flour if they keep on."

As he caught the laughter, Purnell's heart quickened to the woman. Helpless and beset with darkness as he was, her gay courage was wonderfully reassuring to him. He felt a glow of pride in this woman whom he had never seen, who could face this rather precarious situation without the least sign of fear. She—— Another bullet plugged the wall, breaking on his thought; and again and again the same thing happened, without any of the missiles penetrating the stout logs.

"They mean to get us," he commented; "but at present they're only wasting ammunition, and if Ranleigh is anywhere in the neighbourhood the sound of the firing is bound to warn him."

For over an hour the sniping continued, and then ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

"Grown tired," commented Purnell. "They're going to think out some other plan, I guess."

"Ugh!" grunted Canim, a sharp note of surprise in his tone.

"What is it?" asked Miss Stefanson quickly.

"Man on de lac," answered Canim.

"Man!" cried Purnell in sudden anxiety. "Good heavens! I hope it isn't Ranleigh. Is he coming this way? If he is they'll get him, sure."

"Man hav' dogs!" explained the Indian. "He go up de lac."

"I wonder who it can be?" mused Purnell, relieved. "Not Ranleigh for a certainty. He will come the other way. This stretch of country is growing as crowded as Broadway."

"Indian! I expec'," said Canim. "Dose men outside dey hev seen. Dey go to meet him. I hear de dogs."

From her position at one of the loopholes, Miss Stefanson took up the report. "The man has seen them! Ah! Did you hear that? They are shouting to him. He is travelling more slowly, waiting for them to overtake him, I suppose."

"Can you see them?" asked Purnell.

"No! But—yes, the man has stopped; he is waiting for them. Ah! now I can see. There is one man riding a sled. He is making a great pace, but I have half a mind to try a shot."

"Better not," counselled Purnell. "See what happens."

A few minutes passed in silence, then once more the woman began to report progress. "They have met! They are talking, I think." Again there was a lapse of minutes, then she said: "They have finished."



The traveller has resumed his way up the lake. Evidently he doesn't count in this affair. I expect, as Canim said, that he is an Indian."

"That is more than likely."

"The other man is making an oblique line northward. The bluff will hide him in a moment. He is taking no chances, and he is too far off to fire with any likelihood of scoring a hit! . . . He is out of sight now. What next, I wonder?"

"Nothing for a time, I guess. These fellows outside have probably realized that they can't do much in daylight. They will very likely wait until darkness, and then attack. They won't worry about taking us alive, I imagine. Now that they have their hands upon the gold it will be their policy to wipe us clean out."

"But they shan't do that," said Hilda Stefanson quickly. "We won't let them. Mr. Ranleigh may return soon, and when you are able to see we shall be more than a match for them."

Silence fell upon the cabin, profound silence on the white world outside. The minutes passed with leaden feet, and grew to an hour without anything happening. Compelled to inactivity, the three people in the cabin sat engaged with private thoughts, Canim and the woman keeping unwearying watch. Purnell wondered where Ranleigh was, and hoped fervently that he would not stumble into the hands of Slackman. If the latter or any of his gang discovered his trail and ranged northward it was more than possible that the baronet might fall straight into their toils; but whilst he waxed anxious upon his friend's account, he found consolation in an element in the situation of which the men outside knew nothing. The Grey Wolf was to be reckoned with. He had promised his protection, and Purnell felt assured that that promise

would be kept. If only he by any chance should hear of the position at the cabin—— Suddenly his thought broke off, and he gave a sharp laugh of exultation.

"By Jove! The Indian!"

"The Indian!" exclaimed Miss Stefanson, in a startled voice. "What do you mean? Of what are you thinking, Mr. Purnell?"

"That fellow who was out on the lake!" he answered. "Those rascals let him go, and he is our angel of deliverance if I am not mistaken. I would lay all the gold outside upon the chance."

"The angel of deliverance! How?"

"He was bound to hear the firing, and he would guess there was something wrong! They let him go and he will take the news up the lake, probably to the encampment which Ranleigh has gone to visit, for there can't be so many tribes in this God-forsaken land. Ranleigh will hear, or the Grey Wolf, and one or other of them will bring help. All we have to do is to hang on until they come."

"That ought not to be difficult," said Miss Stefanson thoughtfully. "We can at least last without difficulty until darkness falls. It is then the trouble will come."

"Yes!"

Purnell fell silent again, and for a long time nothing happened; then the distant firing was resumed, and for the rest of the day at brief intervals was continued, without any hurt being sustained by the inhabitants of the hut. With the coming of twilight the sniping ceased, and as the long twilight steadily deepened to darkness a feeling of tensity fell upon the three of them.

"They'll surely begin soon," remarked Miss Stefanson.

"Is it quite dark yet?" asked Purnell.

"No! But in a few minutes it will be."

They fell silent. Outside the hut all was deadly still; no sound of voice, no whimper of dogs reached them; and, waiting expectantly, they found the unearthly stillness very trying to the nerves. When they broke the silence by speaking it was in whispers, and the very whispering seemed to add to the feeling of tenseness. Then quite suddenly the Indian gave one of the grunts which seemed to be his sole way of expressing surprise.

"What is it, Canim?"

"Dey take one of de sleds out—ugh! Dey stop, an'——"

In the same second Miss Stefanson's rifle cracked, and was immediately answered from the lake.

"A miss," she commented, and then explained. "They have taken the sled out of the snow, less than a hundred yards from the cabin, and there is a man behind it using it as a breastwork. I think he aimed at the loophole as I fired. His bullet struck quite close!"

A new anxiety awoke in Purnell. There was but one chance in a hundred that the marksman behind the sled would achieve his purpose, but the possibility of that one chance coming to pass disturbed him profoundly.

"You must be careful, Miss Stefanson. Don't fire if you can avoid it. Don't give the man a chance of locating the loophole. He will probably only fire at the flash of your rifle, and if the mark is not offered him he will soon grow tired of lying there. Indeed, if he does it for very long he will freeze."

"I will be careful, very careful!" was the whispered reply.

The man behind the sled, falsifying Purnell's anticipation, opened fire again. Plainly he was using a

repeating rifle, and a stream of bullets plugged the wooden walls.

"Keep quiet! Keep quiet!" counselled Purnell, and then half groaned. "Oh, if I could only see."

Then suddenly while the firing was still proceeding, he lifted his hand and slipped the bandage from his eyes. Then he opened them, but swiftly closed them as he caught the glow of the stove. He turned his head towards the darker part of the hut, and again opened his eyes. In the shadows he saw the outline of Hilda Stefanson, and he laughed with exulting relief.

"What is it?" she asked in a tense whisper. "Why——"

"I can see quite well in the gloom," he said, rising and moving towards her. "There is another rifle, and I can use——"

"But your eyes," broke in the woman protestingly. "You must not risk them. You must——"

"The night will not hurt them. So long as I do not look at the glare of the stove I feel no pain, and I can see you quite clearly."

The last remark was not strictly true. Though he was staring earnestly at the face close to his own he could not make out its lineaments, but of one thing he was able to assure himself: the woman, as he had anticipated, was tall, tall as himself, and nobly built. If only he could see her face——

His unvoiced desire was broken on by the sound of Canim's rifle, and by a shouted curse outside.

"Anoder man go to de sled," said Canim in explanation. "I hit heem, I tink; but he hav' crawled behind."

"Good! That will make them careful!"

The voice of some unseen person outside shouted a question, which those in the cabin distinctly heard:

"Did they get Bill?"

Purnell waited anxiously for the answer, and when it came experienced disappointment.

"Nope! Leastways, they split his ear. Get ready."

"Right-ho!"

"There's something coming!" said Purnell quickly. "Some plan they're going to put in execution. I wonder what it is. That was a warning. I——"

The firing from the sled broke out again; and as now there were two men behind it, they pumped a steady stream of lead into the cabin wall. At the same moment a third rifle began to speak in another direction, and Canim ran to the loophole on that side to reconnoitre. Half a minute later he spoke.

"Dere is a man in de snow. I not see him, but I see de fire of him gun. I shoot next time?"

"Shoot away!" said Purnell with a short laugh.

He stood by Hilda Stefanson listening, clear of the loopholes and of any chance bullet that might find its way through. Their ears told them that so far the two men had not yet left the shelter of the sled, and it was no use putting their lives in needless jeopardy. And as they stood there, Purnell with his back to the stove, a piece of resinous wood crackled into brief flame, lighting up Hilda Stefanson's face. He saw it clearly, astonishingly young, white and statuesque in the light, the fine eyes aglow, and he laughed a sudden joyous laugh.

"Why—why do you laugh?"

"Your hair is golden?" he asked in reply.

"Yes, but why——"

"I knew it! Back there in the chair I dreamed of you as you are——"

"You dreamed of me?" she asked whisperingly.

"Why not? You saved my life, and till now I have not looked on you."

"But, but——"

"You are all that I dreamed," he whispered back—"if your eyes are blue as were Sverdrup's."

"They are blue!"

"The cold blue of the Northern seas?" he asked. "I have been in the Baltic and up the fjords, and Sverdrup's eyes were of the colour of those seas in the sunshine, and yours——"

"But what of it?" she whispered back.

"Girl, can't you guess? I——"

The crack of Canim's rifle broke on the wild declaration he was about to make, and swiftly the answer came from outside in a perfect fusillade which sent them to the loopholes. Then quite suddenly the Indian grunted, whirled and crashed to the cabin floor with a groan.

"Be careful. Keep watch. They've got the Indian," said Purnell, and crossed the cabin to the place where Canim lay. It was in the darkest part of the hut, and for a moment as he knelt beside him, Purnell feared the man was killed. But to his relief Canim moved, and then sat up.

"It is there!" explained the Indian, touching his left shoulder.

Purnell made a swift examination. His eyes did not serve him very well; but, cutting open the moose-hide tunic, he found the wound and bound it as well as he could, the Indian stoically suffering the operation without so much as a murmur. He was still engaged upon the task when Miss Stefanson cried out: "They are pushing the sled nearer. I am sure of it. I am going to fire."

The crack of the rifle followed the words, and whilst Purnell completed his task she fired twice more, apparently without effect, for after the third shot a little cry of dismay broke from her.

"I cannot stop them," she whispered. "And the sled covers them. They move nearer."

"Let me look," said Purnell, and was moving in that direction when in the momentary stillness there came a sound that made his heart leap with sudden fear, and which brought him to a standstill. This was the rattle of the wooden latch, as some one outside tugged the latch-string smartly, and in almost the same second some heavy body was thrown against the door. But the primitive bar, a strong piece of wood slipped in sockets in each door-post, held fast, and whoever was outside remained there.

He looked at Hilda Stefanson. To his troubled eyes her face was like some white flower in the darkness, and there was a quiver in her voice as she whispered: "They have reached the hut! We are lost!"

"No! Not yet!" he answered back hoarsely. "We are in and they are out."

He moved towards the loophole from which she had been observing the progress of the sled; but before he reached it there issued from it a red stream of fire, that brought stabbing pains to his tender eyes, and that seemed to blind him anew. In a trice he guessed what had happened. In the brief interval whilst he and Miss Stefanson had been looking towards the door the men behind the sled had left it, and rushed the loopholes. Blinded as he was, he acted with swift decision. The situation was desperate now, but it was not yet altogether lost. He made a leap that brought him to Miss Stefanson's side, and the next moment he whirled with her into the corner where the stores were piled. They formed an angle which was out of range of all the loopholes, and commanded only by the window. There among the cowed dogs they crouched, whilst bullets plugged the wooden walls of the cabin, and as he felt her

shaking beside him he stretched a hand and found hers.

"My dear," he whispered, "my dear——"

He got no further, for at that moment she cried out in warning: "The window! They are forcing the barricade!"

The firing through the loopholes slackened. A man laughed harshly outside, and as one of the sacks of flour fell Purnell trained his rifle on the window. His companion caught the action and moved suddenly, and the next moment her rifle was pointing in the same direction.

"Good!" he whispered. "When the sack gives way——"

They saw it sway, then it fell with a thud; but before either of them pulled a trigger, the howl of a wolf shivered through the night outside, and was taken up by a pack. A man shouted hoarsely, curses sounded, a rifle cracked, then followed the wild howl of charging men.

"The Grey Wolf!" shouted Purnell exultingly. "In the nick of time!" Hilda Stefanson cried out in relief as he shouted, and they stood upright together, then as she swayed he caught her in his arms.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE RESCUE

IT was the morning after his arrival at the Nahoni camp, and Roy Ranleigh was walking up the river-side with Lisette. Behind them the smoke of the tepees rose like fairy pillars in the still air, and ahead of them the sombre trees were dark under their pall of glistening snow. The low sun was behind them, and, as they walked briskly, on the girl's face was a look of great content.



"You arranged things with my father last night, Roy?" asked the girl presently as they drew well away from the camp.

"Yes, my dear. We had no difficulty about that. The matter now rests with you and me. When shall we be married, sweetheart?"

"Oh," cried the girl, with a swift flush. "I have not thought of that—I—I——"

"The sooner the better, I think," said Ranleigh as she broke off.

"But my father?" cried Lisette in some distress. "I should have to leave him."

"Your father will have it so. I talked with him far into the night. He has grown to love the life up here, and will not leave it. I suggested that he might go and live in the States; but that has no attraction for him, nor has England. He has lived so long in the North, that the wildness of it has entered into his blood; whilst he feels that to leave his Indians would be equivalent to a desertion. He thinks that without him the orderly tribal life that he has evolved would slip into chaos; and that with the influx of white men on the Yukon there is a real danger that if he left them his Indians might become the tools and prey of all sorts of blackguards, so he will not leave them."

"And you—what do you think about it, Roy?"

"On the whole I agree with him. Were he to return to the world he knew in his youth, he would find that things had changed enormously; that he did not fit, and I think that he would be more an exile in the South among them than he has ever been up here. He would miss the authority that he now exercises. All purpose would be gone out of his life, and I gather that he is not a man to enjoy spending his time in twiddling his thumbs. Here he has much

to do ; he is lawyer, judge, prime minister and chancellor in one, and to be the master and moulder of some hundreds of lives is no unworthy task. After all, it is a man's work ; the sort of job that a great many men of his race follow officially, and that he does it independently of government sanction in no way detracts from its inherent greatness."

"Then you think he is right to continue here?"

"Frankly, yes. But that does not apply to you——"

"Oh, but——"

"Listen, my dear. It is your father's wish that some day you should return to the home of his childhood, to the life that is rightly yours. The North holds much for a man, as your father has proved ; to him when life is packed with purpose it ceases to be exile, but for a woman it is desolation—a bleak life in bleak circumstances, ending—well, in an exile's grave."

"But I have much to do also. The women here——"

"You would have much to do at Anthorpe, also. For many years little has been done for the villagers on the estate, owing partly to the fact that the Rangleighs have long been an impoverished race, and to the further fact that my mother died three years after my father's succession, and so for over twenty years there has been no lady of the Manor. We together can change all that. The long talk I had with your father last night gave me a new view of life. I came to America to find wealth to bolster up an impoverished estate, but my purpose was selfish in its base, and not altogether honourable in the means by which it was to be achieved."

"Roy—what was the means?"

"I do not think I will tell you now, dear. I may say that the path by which I first hoped to find riches was blocked completely and for ever when I met you in the store at Skagway."

"Ah!" said Lisette with a quick feminine jealousy, "there was some one else—another woman?"

"Not anyone whom you can count a rival, dear! Don't let us distress ourselves by raking up dead things. What I was going to say to you was that the selfish purpose which brought me from England to seek gold has gone. The talk I had with my uncle last night quite killed it. And with the gold that I shall take from here you and I will make a new Anthorpe—such an estate as your father himself could make if it were possible for him to return. And he wants you to go to Anthorpe. He told me last night that many times he had been tempted to break the seal of silence about himself, and write to ask my father to take you to the life he feels you ought to live. He was on the point of doing so four years ago when, in a six months' old paper, he read the account of my father's death. So you see, Lisette, everything urged you along this way——"

"Except my love for my father!"

"Even that if he wishes it," answered her lover quickly. "And there is another aspect of the situation that perhaps you ought to consider."

"What is that?" demanded Lisette quickly.

"'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife,'" he quoted quietly, and then added with a smile: "I suppose the law is feminine in its application as well as masculine."

"But," began Lisette, in some distress, "the circumstances are quite unusual; my father——"

Ranleigh glanced swiftly over his shoulder. They were out of sight of the encampment, alone in the white world. He stopped, slipped from the great webbed shoes, and gathered her in his arms, and broke on her protestation with a kiss.

"Lisette," he whispered, "you love me?"

"How can you ask?" she whispered back.

"Then you will come to me, as I pray, and as your father wishes. It will be many months before we leave this neighbourhood. A year at least—perhaps two, who knows?—but at least all the next summer we shall be here. And if you wish, I promise you that every third year, whilst your father lives, we will spend some months up here."

"But that will be a great sacrifice for you to——"

"No! No! I shall like it. It will be a pleasure in itself, and to be able to talk to your father about what we are doing at Anthorpe will be real gladness! Lisette, you must agree."

"If I must——"

"You must, my dear. It is your father's wish. If you would make him really happy this is the way. This life up here he loves, but you have long been a source of secret care to him as he has thought of you, alone, without friends, and remote from your own kind. If you marry me you will annihilate that particular care completely, and make him a really happy man, whilst you will make myself—— But you know that. Lisette, you will agree?"

She looked at him smilingly. In her great dark eyes there was the light that he had first seen there on the Yukon trail; but now it was no flash as of summer lightning or flickering aurora, but a steady glow.

"It seems that I must," she whispered.

"Yes," he said, "yes! Life and destiny and love have marked this trail for you."

"But the frost will mark something else if we do not march on," she said with tremulous laughter, that betrayed rather than hid the depth of feeling that she would have concealed.

They walked on together, side by side, and for a

moment the creak and clack of the snowshoes and the crunching of the crisp snow were the only sounds that broke the utter stillness of the white world through which they moved, then Ranleigh spoke again :

"Your father hoped and prayed that you would reach this decision, and last night he suggested that in the event of your agreeing we should get one of the missionary priests to come up here for the marriage. It seems that he knows a good man across the American border——"

"Father Bernard! They are great friends. He baptized me!"

"That is the name. Lisette—you will agree?"

"Yes."

"That is great!" he cried, and then they turned on the backward trail to the camp.

That the news they brought was more than acceptable to the Grey Wolf his face showed, when Ranleigh told him of their decision.

"Good!" he said, "good. Then we'll send for Father Bernard, and you shall have such a wedding as this country has never known—for Lisette is the daughter of a Chief."

He left them to give his orders, and an hour afterwards they watched a dog-train move out, with a couple of Indians breaking trail to the West, and Roy Ranleigh laughed.

"Cupid's messengers!"

"Yes!" she answered. "I wonder what Father Bernard will think?"

"And I wonder how long he will be in coming."

"Not very long," laughed the girl. "Father Bernard is a great traveller——"

They were still standing watching the receding messengers, when round a tree-crowned cape came a dog-train travelling at a great pace, an Indian on the sled.

"Jehu, the son of Nimshi, in his Northern incarnation!" laughed Ranleigh as they watched.

Others also were watching, and suddenly the girl spoke: "The man brings news of some kind or he would not travel——" She did not finish the sentence, for whilst the words were still on her lips some unevenness in the trail caused the sled to halt, and the driver was thrown into the snow, whilst, unable to drag the overturned sled, the dogs were brought to a standstill. A great laugh went up from the onlookers; but the man in the snow picked himself up, and ran on towards the camp without stopping to right the sled. The merriment suddenly died. The Grey Wolf, who had witnessed the accident himself, stepped forward to meet the man, whose face betrayed an excitement unusual in a man of his race; and in quick guttural speech the man delivered the news that he had brought. The Grey Wolf asked a sharp question or two, and whilst the man was answering, Ranleigh glanced at the girl, and was surprised by a look of deep concern on her face.

"Lisette," he asked quickly, "what is it? There is something wrong?"

"Yes," she said, "I think your friend at the cabin is in some kind of trouble. I did not hear what the man said at first, but——"

The Grey Wolf's voice barking orders in the native tongue broke on her words, and she stopped to listen; then as men began to run she said: "Whatever it is, it is serious. My father is sending an expedition. He——"

The Grey Wolf himself came towards them. "Roy," he said, "your partner is in difficulties at your cabin. There are several white men attacking some one who is shut up in it. They stopped that man, but let him go when they found he was a stranger; but they

are using rifles, for he heard them shooting long after he had left them behind. As you know, as Chief of the Nahonis I regard all this district as within my jurisdiction, and I am going down there at once."

"I will come too," answered Ranleigh quickly. "That Slackman crowd, of whom I told you last night, must have found our trail after all. They are a ruthless lot."

"I hope your partner will be able to hold out," said the Grey Wolf earnestly. "It will take us some hours to reach there."

No more was said, but half an hour afterwards a single sled with a double team of dogs and a score of Indians with the Grey Wolf and Ranleigh were speeding southward. The pace was a great one, and speech was impossible. All the baronet's stamina was required to keep up with the expedition, but anxiety for his friend was itself a driving force helping him to keep the pace. Through the declining day they raced on. The long twilight fell and merged itself into the ghostly gloom of night, and still the Indians raced untiringly, without halting; then quite suddenly the Grey Wolf barked an order, and the whole cavalcade came to a standstill. Ranleigh's body was wet with perspiration; and perspiration that had forced itself outward was frozen on his clothing, so that he looked like a snow man. But whilst his limbs were aching his breath was even, and as he stood there wondering why the halt had been called, but glad of the moment's respite, faintly on the still air came a sound that there was no mistaking.

"A rifle shot!" said the Grey Wolf. "They still fight! We shall be in time."

Again the Indians moved forward, slowly at first, but gathering pace as they went, and in the ghostly darkness, with the stars blazing coldly overhead, they

struck the head of the lake on which the cabin stood. Again the Grey Wolf called a halt, gave his orders, and the little company, resolving itself into pairs, disappeared in the gloom along separate trails.

"We will go together, Roy," said the Grey Wolf, "and take the direct trail."

To the tune of intermittent rifle-fire they moved on; and after a little time flashes punctuated the darkness ahead, and Ranleigh in his anxiety found himself making a faster pace than his companion.

"Steady, Roy! I do not want to alarm the attackers. I want to gather the whole bunch. That is why my Indians have gone ahead. Let them get in position. Whilst the firing continues, your friend is probably safe."

They moved forward together in silence. The sound of firing grew clearer. They reached the cliff with its great vein of gold and there halted, whilst the Grey Wolf reconnoitred. He disappeared round the corner of the bluff, but a moment later he was back again.

"They are at close quarters. Another minute——" He broke off, lifted his hands to his mouth, and gave the wolf-call which Ranleigh had heard on the night of his visit to the cabin. As it rang weirdly through the stillness, it was instantly responded to by a score of voices. "Come, Roy!"

They ran forward together, and as they rounded the bluff Ranleigh saw vague shadows closing all round the cabin, where two shadowy figures stood by the window, whilst another was outlined against the snow-covered logs, with a fourth standing in the shadow of the doorway. Taken by surprise, the attackers, attacked in turn, stood there frozen into immobility. The first of the Indians were on them before they had recovered from their surprise, and



then Slackman's voice roared through the silence which had supervened on the din of strife.

"Indians, by G——! Run, boys!"

He himself set the example, plunging down towards the lake, and the Grey Wolf gathered him in his arms as if he had been a child. He struggled and cursed and writhed pantingly all in vain, until his captor spoke:

"Steady, my man, or you will hurt yourself."

At that he subsided and stared amazedly into the Grey Wolf's face.

"By Heaven, you're a white man!"

"By Heaven, I am!" said the Grey Wolf, twisting him round, and locking his arms deftly.

"And here's another, Slackman!" said Ranleigh, as he slipped the captive's belt to secure him.

"Well, I'll be shot!"

"Or hanged!" commented Ranleigh, as he drew the buckle tight.

"Thought yer was in ther cabin with thet girl an' Purnell."

"Girl?" cried Ranleigh in amazement.

"Yep. Didn't know about her, hey? Well, she's Stefanson's sister, an'——"

Ranleigh stayed to hear no more; the other members of Slackman's crew were already in the hands of the Indians, and he made a bee-line towards the cabin door.

"Purnell!" he cried as he hammered upon it.

"Purnell, old man!"

A moment later the door swung open, and as he stepped inside he caught his friend's hand.

"In time, thank God!" he cried as he looked round.

"On the last tick, I reckon, Roy. Allow me to introduce you to the lady who saved my life—Miss Stefanson, Sir Roy Ranleigh."

Ranleigh found himself looking into the face of a tall, well-built girl, whose face he could see only

indistinctly in the gloom, but whose eyes, reflecting the glow of the stove, were radiant.

"Delighted to meet you, Miss Stefanson. You are the tip-topmost of the surprises of this night! How-ever did you get up here?"

"Came up with Slackman and his crew," intervened Purnell, "and found me wandering snow-blind. Re-frained from shooting me, by the mercy of God——"

"But why should you want to shoot him, Miss Stefanson?" asked Ranleigh, laughing.

"Because Slackman told me that he had shot my brother Sverdrup on the Dyea trail, and——"

"A black lie!" interrupted Ranleigh.

"That I know now very well, but then——Ah!"

"What is it?"

"We forget Canim. He is hurt!"

"By Jove, yes! Light the candle, Ranleigh."

"No, wait! Your eyes, Mr. Purnell——"

"Mr. Purnell!" The American laughed oddly, and leaning peered into Miss Stefanson's face. "That will do very well for a little time, for a very little time—but—— Here's the bandage, my dear. Return me to the darkness that brought me to you!"

Hilda Stefanson laughed, a rich, ringing laugh, that had in it a note of understanding as well as of amusement; and whilst she tied the bandage over Purnell's eyes, she explained:

"Mr. Purnell has been suffering from snow-blindness. His eyes are better now, and in the gloom he can see, but light will hurt him."

Ranleigh lit one candle and a second, and then looked round. Canim was on the floor sitting up, with a look of wonder on his face, and the baronet helped him to his feet just as the Grey Wolf entered.

"We have them all, Roy," he announced. "The problem is, what shall we do with them?"

"I don't know!"

"They ought to be hanged."

"That is likely enough! But there's a more immediate job here. Canim's been hit!"

"Ah! I will see to him. I have some acquaintance with wounds. You might block up that window and shut the door to keep out the cold. Come here, Canim. If one of you will hold a light."

On the word Hilda Stefanson caught up the candle, and whilst she held it explained: "Mr. Purnell bandaged it as well as he could in the dark. The wound goes right through the shoulder, so I think the bullet must have passed out."

"That is a certainty, I think! If you can get me a little hot water, Miss Stefanson, we'll soon make Canim comfortable. In a fortnight he will be about, as well as ever. The recuperative power of the Indians up here is really marvellous."

Whilst the Grey Wolf and the girl were busy with the Indian Purnell rapidly explained what had happened, and then asked: "But how did you happen along in the nick of time as you did?"

"One of Grey Wolf's Indians brought word that men were attacking the cabin——"

"We saw him!" interrupted Purnell. "The blackguards stopped him, but let him go on his way."

"A lucky thing they did," said Ranleigh. "He came to Grey Wolf's camp post-haste, and we travelled down here as I never believed that men could travel on their two legs. The pace was really wonderful."

"It wasn't a mite too fast!" laughed Purnell. "In another five minutes Slackman and his rascals would have been in the cabin! But, I say, Ranleigh, is it true that Miss Lisette is the Grey Wolf's daughter, as Canim says?"

"Yes, and my cousin."

"Your—what?"

"My first cousin!" answered Ranleigh smilingly.

"Meaning that the Grey Wolf is your first uncle?"

"Yes," laughed Ranleigh.

"Well—if this isn't the most wonderful corner of the Lord's vineyard that I ever struck!" commented the American. "Any more relations up your sleeve?"

"No," said Ranleigh, laughing again.

"Any more surprises then?"

"Well, I'm going to be married as soon as a priest who has been sent for, arrives!"

"Wise man. I have an idea that I'll be getting married myself, if Hilda Stefanson will be persuaded to enter into harness."

"Is that so? I wondered——"

"That is so. But I say, Ranleigh, you're not going into the White Chief business with your uncle?"

"No," answered Ranleigh smilingly. "My uncle's going to give us privileges and help us to work that gold."

"Then I guess Edith van Corlow's going to get hers."

"That's a sure thing."

"Wonder what your uncle will do with the Slackman lot?"

"I don't know."

"We'll have to leave it to him; the decision must be made by the anointed king of these territories, I reckon. But there's one man out there that I want to trounce myself. He manhandled me when I was blind as a bat, and but for Canim showing up opportunely I believe he would have killed me. That Indian's a brick, a whole brick, bright red, and sound as a bell. If the Grey Wolf's crowd are like him, I could find it in my heart to envy your uncle his kingship."

"They're a good lot, as I understand, and they're disciplined like a British regiment of the line. But let us go outside. I want to have a look at Slackman and his bunch of bad men, to see how they bear themselves in adversity."

"Me too! Come along. I lift this confounded bandage long enough to crow, at any rate."

Ranleigh laughed, and linking his arm with his friend's led him outside and towards the Indians, who were engaged in kindling fires and making a camp for the night.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE LONG TRAVERSE

THE four men who had been captured, two of them wounded, stood in a sullen group, guarded by several Indians, and as Ranleigh and Purnell approached them, Slackman spoke:

"Say, yer two, what's ther game?"

"That is not in our hands," answered Ranleigh sternly.

"Not in yore hands," cried the desperado sharply.

"Mean ter say yer goin' ter leave us ter these Siwashes? Thet ain't a white man's game no way."

"Possibly not! But these Indians are not Siwashes, and we happen to be in their country. It is with their Chief you will have to deal. He may send you down to Dawson for the mounted police to handle, or he may choose to hang you himself——"

"To hang us!" cried another of the captives, who happened to be the man Charley. "That be d——d for a bluff!"

"You think so? Well, I'm not bluffing. I believe that the Grey Wolf is quite capable of performing that act of justice."

"The Grey Wolf!" exclaimed Slackman, and then whistled. "Phew! I heard an old-timer yarnin' about him up at Dawson. Mean ter say we've hit against the white Indian's pack of braves?"

"Just that," answered Ranleigh. "And it is he who will decide what is to be done with you."

He took Purnell's arm, and was turning away when Slackman broke in again pleadingly: "Say, yer two ain't going ter let these redskins handle us? Yer got some sort o' pull on this Grey Wolf, I reckon, an' I hope as yer'll play square ter your own kind; an' not stand by whilst he flays us."

"It is out of our hands," answered Ranleigh, pausing; "but we might do what we can on conditions."

"Conditions?" Slackman spoke quickly. "Table the cards an' let's see how ther game stands!"

"Well," said Ranleigh quietly, "this is the position. Some one fitted you out for this expedition, and sent a representative with you. I want to know who is that man who is behind you?"

"That's dead easy ter tell," replied Slackman, with a short laugh. "He's a big gun in Dawson, but I reckon he don't count much in this mess-up; so there ain't no harm in whisperin' his name, which is Cornelius van Corlow!"

"Van Corlow!" cried Ranleigh in amazement.

"Yep. Reckon yer have heard the name before. Hey?"

Ranleigh took no notice of the ruffian's remark. He was, indeed, too much astonished to notice it.

"How did he come in?" he asked brusquely.

"We went ter him with the proposition, knowing as he was interested in you, an' he rose ter it like a fish hungry for its dinner. There ain't no flies on Cornelius, and he's grub-stakers in plenty workin' ther creeks for him; but he was extra speshul keen when

he got your name an' that of Purnell there, an' there wasn't no difficulty at all. Van Corlow just jumped at et, an' all he asked was thet Charley here should come along as—as—er—supercargo, I guess."

"But why was he so keen?"

"Better ask Charley hisself; though I reckon Stefanson's hill of gold ud make a dead Siwash keen!"

Ranleigh turned to the man in question. "Tell me why was Cornelius van Corlow so keen on foiling Purnell and myself?"

The man did not answer, and Ranleigh spoke again, a quiet note of menace in his voice:

"Better speak up if you want me to help you with the Grey Wolf."

"Tell him, yer durned fool," cried Slackman. "Do yer want all our hides roastin'?"

Thus adjured, van Corlow's agent spoke. "I don't reckon Purnell there comes into the game at all so far as Cornelius is concerned. 'Twas you that he made a dead set against, and about whom he gave particular instructions."

"Particular instructions?"

"Yep; said you weren't on any account to be allowed to get an ounce of gold, it being as much as his peace of mind was worth."

"What did he mean by that?"

"Can't say for sure. He didn't explain; but as a man's womenfolk most often break up his peace of mind, and as his daughter showed a goodish bit of feeling when we pulled out on the trail North, I reckon she comes in it somewhere, but I can't say plainer than that."

Ranleigh did not doubt that the man was speaking the truth, and recalling Edith van Corlow's threat he had no need to press the man further. The little that van Corlow's tool was able to hint was sufficient, and

the baronet was assured that the mining magnate's part in the affair was largely due to his daughter's inspiration. She had said that he should pay for his action in relation to herself, and this was the way that she had chosen. As he took his friend's arm to lead him away, he laughed sharply.

"What is it, Ranleigh?" asked Purnell. "Something making you feel merry?"

"Two handfuls of gold, just that!" laughed Ranleigh.

"You really believe that fellow's suggestion?"

"Haven't a doubt of its truth! Remember, I heard the girl talk in Dawson. She was almost melodramatic in her threats, and here is the outworking of them."

"Well! They've gone all to pieces, thanks to the Grey Wolf."

"Yes. But I say, Purnell, what are we to do in relation to those fellows?"

"Guess that's out of our fingers, Roy. What you told those scallywags was right; it's the Grey Wolf's business and not ours, and I'm all for leaving it with him. Those fellows would have had no mercy on us, and I'll take oath that if they had had their way we should have been wolf-meat by now. We'll see what he says before we say anything."

And what the Grey Wolf did say when he considered the question next morning was very much to the point, and this decision was one that the friends could take no exception to.

"Those men are no better than road-agents, and are a danger to the whole community. If, as you suspect, they were responsible for Sverdrup Stefan-son's murder on the Dyea trail, they ought to be hanged; but Dyea is not in my jurisdiction any more than it is in the district of the mounted police at Dawson. But



what they have done up here I can deal with, or I can send them down to Dawson with an account of their doings. But there are strong objections to the latter course, which must be taken into consideration."

"What are they?" asked Purnell.

"It would draw attention to this district. Men would argue that there must be some strong reason for a crime of the magnitude these men have attempted, and it would not be difficult for even dull minds to deduce the reason correctly. That would mean something in the nature of a gold stampede up here, and as I have told you I will not have that if I can help it, in a country which I regard as belonging to my Indians. If I send these men back to Dawson I shall probably have my hands full in turning men back, and sooner or later that will mean trouble, and conflict with the British authorities." The Grey Wolf was silent for a moment, then he asked abruptly: "What is the least that would happen to those men if I did send them to Dawson with an account of their doings, and with you for witnesses of the truth?"

Purnell laughed. "The least? Oh, I guess they'd chop wood up at the barracks for the winter, and when the ice broke they'd go out with a blue ticket in hand."

"A blue ticket?"

"Yes. Special mounted police issue. They have a motto on them: 'Leave within twenty-four hours.'"

"You mean they would be deported—sent out of the country?"

"Yes. There are two sorts of tickets, pink and blue, given to undesirables. The pink ones say, 'Leave by the first safe conveyance,' and——"

The Grey Wolf laughed suddenly. "I think I shall issue a blue ticket to each of them—to-day!"

"You'll send 'em out to go where they choose?"

"No. They would make their way to Dawson, and

then I should most certainly have the very trouble that I am seeking to avoid."

"Then what will you do?"

"I shall send them out under escort across the Alaskan border, along a way that will mean they won't get out for months. I will think out details, and work out a chart for their journey——"

"You don't mean them to get lost?" asked Rangleigh quickly.

"No. They may do that. But if they do, it will be because they depart from my advice. I do not mean that they shall follow *La Longue Traverse* of the old H.B.C. factors."

"What's that?" asked Purnell.

"It is said that when they caught rival traders in their districts some of the factors deprived their free-trading rivals of all arms, gave them a little pack of food, and set them free to make their way to civilization if they could. The trappers and the Indians had strict orders not to help the unfortunate challengers of a great monopoly, with results that you can easily divine. The men, lost in the great woods on the wide barrens or in the maze of waterways, make the long traverse of death, as perhaps they were meant to. That is not my intention with these men. I mean them to reach civilization—some day; but I also mean that they shall be a long time in doing so. But, first, I want them to see that my word is not to be disregarded, and to that end I shall take them to my village that they may be properly impressed. What do you think?"

"It is better than hanging them," said Purnell.

"And you, Roy, what do you think?"

"I agree. Either miners' meeting or the police would do something similar, and it seems to me just."

"Then that is settled! In an hour we will start

for the encampment, but say nothing to these men in the meantime."

Leaving the Grey Wolf, the two men walked towards the cabin, and as they reached it Hilda Stefanson came out. She looked at Purnell, who now wore a pair of wooden snow-spectacles with small traverse slits through which to look, which had been supplied him by one of the Indians; and for the first time, the day being dull and his eyes less troubled, he was able to observe her face. He stopped instinctively, and as the woman also halted, Ranleigh moved on and left them together.

"I am going to see Oscar's grave," said Miss Stefanson, a little quiver in her voice.

"Then I will come with you, if I may. I am half-blind, but——"

"Come, my friend!"

They walked along together, and as they passed out of sight of the cabin, the woman laid a hand upon his arm.

"Let me help you," she said. "Close your eyes and rest them as much as possible."

Purnell did not refuse the proffered help. He closed his eyes as directed, content to move on in darkness by Hilda Stefanson's side; and presently, for the second time, he climbed the hill to the place where stood the symbol of death and life, and stood a little apart, whilst his companion fell on her knees in the snow. He gave one glance at her kneeling there, then with his eyes shut turned away. A minute passed, two minutes, three; then he caught a sound of sobbing that wrung his heart. He waited till he could endure no longer, then he stumbled towards her.

"My dear——" he began stammeringly, laying a hand upon her shoulder. "It is not good to kneel long in the snow."

The woman rose to her feet, and faced him. "I cannot help weeping. Oscar and Sverdrup were all I had, and now I am alone."

"No," he broke in quickly. "I am here, Hilda, and I want you. Back there in the cabin last night, when I thought there was no chance for us, I was going to tell you that——"

"But you had not seen me," she said quickly; "your eyes——"

"I can see you now," he said, "and I am more sure than ever. Hilda, will you marry me?"

"If you really wish——"

"It is the only real wish I have," he said quietly. "For you I would give all the gold in that cliff which your brothers found."

"Then——"

And, without waiting for her to finish, for the second time he took her in his arms.

On the morning of the following day the whole of the Nahoni tribe was lined up outside the encampment, the men with rifles in their hands, whilst Slackman and his friends stood in a group, shivering with fear. There was something menacing in the inscrutable faces and in the immobile line, and the desperado was moved to cry out:

"Ranleigh, for God's sake what's going to happen?"

It was the Grey Wolf who answered the question: "You are going to receive what the Dawson police call the blue ticket."

"Oh! sending us out, are yer?" cried Slackman, suddenly recovering his sang-froid. "Thet's all right. I reckon we'll make Dawson in record time."

"I think not," said the Grey Wolf quietly.

"Hey! What yer gettin' at?"

"I do not mean you to go to Dawson," was the

reply. "I am sending you out by Alaska, by a route of my own devising——"

"By Alaska! Great Scott, man, how d'ye reckon we're going ter do it?"

"That will depend upon yourselves. I am sending some of my Indians with you part of the way, a sufficient number of them to see that you do not play tricks. At a given point they will leave you——"

"Ah, yer mean us to starve?"

"No! You deserve even that, but I am seeking to be just. When they part from you they will leave you one dog-team, stores, one rifle with ammunition, and a map of the route that you will follow if you desire to reach civilization."

"A map?"

"Yes. It will take you as far as a Russian trading-post on the Koipak River, and if you hunt, the food should be sufficient to carry you that far. After that you will have to depend upon yourselves; but it will not be difficult for you to reach Norton Sound, and so sooner or later get back to civilization."

"Hell, man! We may be a year, two years——"

"I do not care if you are ten!" broke in the Grey Wolf. "What I do care is, that you shall not come up here again, and against that I give you solemn warning. It is my will to keep this land free of men like you—and I am not without power to enforce my wishes, as you see!"

He waved his hand towards the assembled tribe, then as Slackman broke into expostulation he checked him.

"Enough, man!" he cried. "Would you that I change my mind?"

He whistled and two dog-teams came into view, with the sleds already loaded. As they halted, half a score of Indians stepped out to the river ready for

the trail. Two of them moved ahead of the teams. The prisoners were set behind the sleds, and the remaining Indians spread themselves fan-wise behind.

"I need not warn you to be careful," said the Grey Wolf quietly. "My men have orders to shoot if you attempt any foolish tricks, and they are disciplined men." Then he raised his voice sharply: "Moosh! Moosh!"

The leading Indians cried to the dogs and cracked their whips, and instantly the teams responded, and a moment later the cavalcade moved forward. The Grey Wolf stood watching with Ranleigh and Purnell by his side, and as the travellers rounded a turn in the trail that would hide the encampment from view, they saw Slackman turn and look back. For a moment his mittened fist was lifted and shaken in futile wrath, then he disappeared from view.

"A bad man," said the Grey Wolf. "Some day he will be hanged! Now for other things—and pleasanter."

Ranleigh sought out Lisette, and, entering her father's house, talked with her there for a while; then, going out together, they came on Purnell and Hilda Stefanson watching with much interest a number of men who were busy packing the snow over a great space of ground near the encampment.

"What's up, Ranleigh?" asked the American as they approached. "Those fellows seem wonderfully active."

Ranleigh looked at Lisette, who blushed and laughed.

"They are preparing the ground for the wedding potlach!"

"The wedding potlach?"

"Yes, for the wedding feast of Roy and myself. To-morrow Father Bernard will arrive——"

"A priest!" broke in Purnell. "That so?"

Then——” He looked at Hilda Stefanson, and laughed with exultation.

“ There’s no need to go to Dawson,” he said. “ We’ll be married up here. I like the notion of a potlach real well, Hilda. . . .”

“ I too shall like a potlach,” laughed Hilda merrily, and so the thing was settled.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a full eight months later when Edith van Corlow, back in her father’s palace in New York, received a registered parcel, which, being opened, revealed a pair of bracelets of nuggets of rough gold strung together on a golden wire. She stared at them wonderingly for a moment, then she picked up a folded paper which accompanied them. As she opened it a slip of printed paper fell out, and she stooped and picked it up curiously, and saw that it was a cutting from a Dawson news-sheet. Then she read :

“ On December 21st, 1898, at Nahoni Village, by Father Bernard of the Jesuit Mission, Sir Roy Rangleigh, of Anthorpe Manor, England, to Lisette, the only daughter of the Grey Wolf, Chieftain of the Nahoni Indians.”

For a moment she stared in amazement, then a feeling of wrathful humiliation overcame her. “ An Indian ! ” she cried. “ Before me ! ”

In that moment she understood the meaning of the bracelets. “ Two handfuls of gold——” She caught them up suddenly, threw them on the floor, and stamped on them in futile anger. Then she desisted and laughed hysterically.

“ An Indian ! ” she said. “ He has become a squawman. Well, anyway that puts him down and out for good. He won’t dare show his face in New York or London again.”

But in that she was mistaken ; for one night twelve

months later, at a reception given by the American wife of an English peer, she came suddenly face to face with Sir Roy himself, with a lady on his arm whose grace and wild-flower beauty took all eyes. She stared in amazement, whilst the baronet bowed gravely in acknowledgment of the involuntary recognition in her eyes. As they passed on she looked after them, and then hurriedly sought out her hostess.

"Sir Roy Ranleigh," she asked hurriedly. "He is here——"

"With his wife," answered the peeress smilingly. "A wonder who puts us all in the shade. If you have not seen her, Edith——"

"But he married a squaw! I saw it in a Dawson newspaper. She was the daughter of some Indian Chief——"

Her hostess smiled. "She was his cousin, and no more a squaw than you or I. There is some romantic story behind it, of which one hears only whispers; but Lady Ranleigh is as white as anyone in the room, whilst Sir Roy himself is as rich as Cræsus. Found some mine which has been worked secretly like many other mines, and now he is on his way to England——" The peeress broke off her flow of information, and laughed merrily. "I was forgetting, Edith! Naturally you are interested. There was a rumour three seasons back that you might become Lady Ranleigh."

"A lie!" said Edith van Corlow coldly as, turning away, she looked towards a merry group of people in the centre of which stood Sir Roy Ranleigh and his beautiful wife.

THE END





## DATE DUE SLIP

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